

Screen



Experience, technique and emotion in *Eternal Sunshine*

Auteurism and commerce in Spanish cinema

Documentary style in recent Cuban films

Channel 4 dossier

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editorial

Screen

Gilmorehill Centre
University of Glasgow
Glasgow G12 8QQ
screen@arts.gla.ac.uk

internet sites:

<http://www.screen.arts.gla.ac.uk>
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issue editor

Simon Frith

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Jim Carrey in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, 2004).

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Auteurism and commerce in contemporary Spanish cinema: *directores mediáticos*

NURIA TRIANA-TORIBIO

For Spanish cinema, 2006 started with a party and a hangover. The party, on 29 January, was 'La Gala' for the Annual Awards of the *Academia de las Artes y las Ciencias Cinematográficas de España* (Spanish Academy of Cinema Arts and Sciences) – the most prestigious Spanish cinema prizes known as the *Goyas*. That year's celebrations were doubly important as the members of the *Academia* – which represents Spain's film professionals from all fields – were not only congratulating themselves on another successful harvest but celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the organization itself.¹

The hangover struck early the following week. On the Tuesday, *Enfoque*, a debate programme on Spanish public television's second channel La 2, devoted itself to the current state of Spanish cinema.² After the high spirits of the weekend, the topics addressed gave cause for sobering reflection. Among the areas discussed were the absence of a level playing field for Spanish cinema *vis à vis* Hollywood and the desire for a cultural exception for cinema, following the French model, by channeling funds into the industry via quotas and taxation.³ Representative figures from the *Academia*, from actors to exhibitors, took part in the debate.⁴

Much of what was discussed had a familiar ring to it, but what was perhaps surprising was that two important players in the industry, filmmaker David Trueba (member of a prominent Spanish family of film professionals) and influential independent producer/distributor/exhibitor Enrique González Macho (owner of *Cines Renoir* and *Princesa*

¹ 'Market share for national films was higher than in the preceding years, reaching 16.7%. ... The 2005 result represents the second best score of the last 15 years, with the exception of 2001 when national market's share reached 17.8%.' European Audiovisual Observatory, *Focus 2006: World Film Market Trends/Tendances du Marché Mondial du Film* (Cannes: Marché du Film, 2006), p. 27.

² *Enfoque* (Focus) is a weekly programme directed and presented by Elena Sánchez, a respected figure among Spain's television journalists. Details on URL: <http://www.rtve.es/tve/informa/enfoque/index.html> [accessed 6 June 2008].

³ The topic of 'cultural exception' as adopted by France has gained momentum since the victory of the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Party) in 2004, which quickly appointed a new director of the *Instituto del Cine y las Artes Audiovisuales* (Spanish Film and Visual Arts Board), Fernando Lara.

⁴ Among the contributors were Pedro Pérez, president of *FAPAE* (*Federación de Asociaciones de Productores Audiovisuales de España*/ Spain's Federation of Producers' Association), Tina Sáenz, actor, and Salvador Agustín, director of programmes of TVE.

cinemas in Madrid, Barcelona and Bilbao), did not reiterate the usual calls for protectionism. Instead they emphasized the need to ditch the ‘we are victims of Hollywood’ excuses and to learn the strategies used by the Hollywood majors. Trueba put it succinctly:

Product placing is what is hard to do. Nowadays cinema means publicity and that does not come cheap. We must control the media. When the media backs a film it succeeds and when it does not, it’s in for a hard time. And there is no money in Spanish cinema for those activities – advertising, publicity and marketing.⁵

5 David Trueba, speaking on *Enfoque* (TV2, tx January 2006).

González Macho and Trueba were not the first to identify a deficiency in Spanish cinema. A series of articles in trade and industry magazines such as *Academia* (the inhouse magazine of the *Academia de las Artes y las Ciencias Cinematográficas*) show that the need to integrate marketing and publicity in the planning and development of a feature or documentary film has long been a preoccupation. Guides for budding producers such as L.A. Cabezón’s and Félix G. Gómez-Urdá’s *La producción cinematográfica* include suggestions on how to tackle *Promoción* and the vital role that this activity should have in film production. But their advice is often vague, unspecific and lacking urgency.⁶

6 L.A. Cabezón and Félix G. Gómez-Urdá, *La producción cinematográfica* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1999).

In this essay I analyze *directores mediáticos* (media-minded/media friendly directors) who first and foremost understand the need to treat marketing as an integral part of production, but equally importantly are highly mindful of the commercial usefulness to the Spanish industry of the category of the auteur as key to strategies for ‘placing the product’ – to use Trueba’s phrase. Auteurism is useful to the industry principally in that fight for control of the media. *Autor mediático* is a term that I have appropriated from an article by film researcher Vicente J. Benet, in which it was used somewhat derogatorily to describe the media-friendliness and exposure of certain auteurs (namely Pedro Almodóvar, Alejandro Amenábar and Julio Medem) whose style and themes can be conveyed to journalists in soundbites and catchy phrases.⁷ He regrets that at present directors have either to be *mediáticos* or to be ignored. While one might sympathize with his hankering after simpler times, the figure of the traditional Spanish auteur who lived and breathed cinema and did not become involved in his own publicity is probably just a myth. Moreover, as Timothy Corrigan argues persuasively in *A Cinema Without Walls*,⁸ the effect of auteurism was and is to serve commerce. Corrigan argues that in the 1990s the way of understanding films that auteurism provided, and the celebrity of the auteurs themselves, worked with, and because of, the needs of distribution and marketing, not in spite of them. As he explains, this is a topic often overlooked, wilfully or otherwise, not only by those who advocate auteurism but also by its critics:

7 Vicente J. Benet, ‘Estilo, industria e institución: reflexiones sobre el canon del cine español actual’, *Archivos de la Filmoteca*, no. 49 (February 2005), pp. 67–81, p. 68.

8 Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema Without Walls: Movies and Culture after Vietnam* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 101–36.

Indeed, one of the chief mystifications or omissions within early theories and practices of auteurism has been a valorization of one or another idea of expression, mostly disconnected from its marketing

9 Ibid., pp.102–3.

10 Janet Harbord, quoting Thomas Schatz, in her *Film Cultures* (London: Sage 2002), p. 78.

11 Txomin Ansola González, 'El decreto Miró: una propuesta ambiciosa pero fallida para impulsar el cine español de los 80', *Archivos de la Filmoteca*, no. 48 (December 2004), p. 119.

and commercial implications. Despite their large differences, theories and practices of auteurism from Astruc and Peter Wollen to Foucault and Stephen Heath . . . share the basic assumptions about the auteur as structuring principle of enunciation, an organizing expression of one sort or another. . . . Formalist and cognitive critiques of auteurism, such as Bordwell's, can vanquish most of the myths of expressivity in the cinema in favor of more formal and heuristic uses for the auteur. Yet, these too do not fully attend to the survival –and, in fact, the increasing importance of the auteur as a *commercial* strategy for organizing audience reception, as a critical concept bound to distribution and marketing aims that identify and address the potential cult status of an auteur. Today, even these modernist corrections, discussions or deconstructions of the romantic roots of auteurism need to be taken another step toward recontextualizing them within industrial and commercial trajectories.⁹

From the late 1960s, Hollywood studios significantly increased the funds and importance invested in marketing and publicity, in a move that signaled 'a distinct break from European art-house in the scale of budgets' and was accompanied by 'the harnessing of new technologies to produce a spectacular form of visual display'.¹⁰ This move ushered in the 1970s blockbusters of George Lucas and Steven Spielberg. Moreover, since the 1980s, strategies such as 'high concept' have ensured that producers can put the minds of investors at rest by delivering films with large budgets, special effects and the right stars, but whose plots can be summed up in twenty-five words or less and are highly media-friendly.

Spanish cinema has always been mindful of what happens across the Atlantic and is affected by it, as are other national cinemas. In this period, however, Spain was undergoing deep political and social transformations as its dictatorship of nearly forty years came to an end in 1975. The governments of the day had very different priorities in mind for Spanish cinema – building a new cinema with democratic and European characteristics the most prominent among them – and the strategies adopted by the majors in the USA and the inaccessible level of investment could only provoke feelings of helplessness. The mechanisms for financing Spanish filmmaking in the 1980s such as the *Decreto Miró* concentrated resources on heavily subsidizing film production and protecting its exhibition, almost obviating the need for private investment. As Txomin Ansola González explains, this had negative side-effects on the marketing of films:

Producers, concentrated as they were on finding the resources to tackle film financing, spent all their energies on that purpose. Marketing films properly became a less important preoccupation when this is a process that should be tied to production.¹¹

Cabezón and Gómez Urdá lament the resulting situation in their manual on film production: 'Spanish cinema has yet to get advertisement

12 Cabezón and Gómez-Urdá, *La producción cinematográfica*, p. 174.

13 Ibid., p. 173.

14 Jennifer Green, 'Spain's independents face wealth gap', *Screen International*, no. 1341 (2002), pp. 1–2.

15 Anne Jäckel, *European Film Industries* (London: British Film Institute, 2003), p. 109.

16 Alejandro Pardo and Peter Yordan, 'Paradoxes of survival in the Europe vs Hollywood Battle: the case of the Spanish film industry', unpublished paper delivered at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies Conference (London, March/April, 2005) n.p.

under its belt'.¹² Towards the end of the 1990s, some US marketing strategies were being appropriated but by the exceptional few. Meritxell Esquirol and Josep Lluís Fecé have argued that Santiago Segura's *Torrente el brazo tonto de la ley*/*Torrente: the Stupid Arm of the Law* (1998), one of the biggest box-office successes of recent years, is in fact, the first Spanish blockbuster. Elsewhere in the industry, Cabezón and Gómez Urdá describe a trend starting at the end of the 1990s:

In spite of the deficiencies, filmmakers – producers, distributors and directors – have understood the need to put in the hands of advertising professionals the promotion of their products, even if the budgets are very limited in proportion to the production cost. Most recently there has been a move to allocate a part of production resources – people and funds – to promotion and there is an increasing demand for services specialized in the promotion of cinema.¹³

One incentive to learn from Hollywood is that it owns the lion's share of film distribution companies; a cursory look at articles from 2001 in *Screen International* by its correspondent in Spain, Jennifer Green, is enough to trace the rise in Spain of the majors' distribution arm.¹⁴ Anne Jäckel has studied how the majors' control has increased throughout Europe, not simply in Spain.¹⁵ Five of the ten most important distributors operating in Spain belong to Hollywood, through mergers and alliances with local companies or otherwise. Hollywood is no longer 'them' but is very much 'us', as Alejandro Pardo and Peter Yordan argue.¹⁶ This situation led in July 2006 to fines being imposed by the *Tribunal de Defensa de la Competencia* (Tribunal for the Defence of Trade Competition) on the Spanish branches of the majors and their collaborators for colluding in their commercial strategies and preventing the existence of a free and competitive market. Whilst the effects of this ruling by the TDC are yet to be felt by the Spanish market, the fact remains that European screens are saturated and there is a struggle to place product, which sometimes leads to state intervention. Screen saturation has cranked up the importance of the promotion of each individual film and of filmmakers as auteurs if they can, or need to, claim that label for themselves. Spanish directors are becoming *mediáticos*, in other words, as a response to the new conditions in which they operate, and we need to contextualize their status within their commercial strategies. I concentrate here on two directors who can lay a claim to the auteur label in Spanish cinema, Álex de la Iglesia and Isabel Coixet. They are *mediáticos* because they offer and use a recognizable public persona (and image), which is an integral part of the release campaign of each film. But they are *mediáticos* too through their use of technologies such as the internet and in particular their ownership of official homepages.

I am not implying that Coixet and de la Iglesia are the only *mediáticos* out there; other directors are even more *mediáticos*, particularly Pedro Almodóvar, who has set the terms of reference by which other

producers/directors operate *vis à vis* marketing. His relationship to my case studies is furthermore significant since his co-owned production company *El Deseo* has played a central role in the careers of both Coixet and de la Iglesia, directors who belong to the same generation, although in Coixet's career there is a gap of seven years between her first film, *Demasiado viejo para morir joven/Too Old to Die Young* (1988), and her second, *Cosas que nunca te dije/Things I Never Told You* (1995). She is one of many women directors whose debut film was financed by state-sponsored initiatives resulting from the *Decreto Miró*, aimed at launching the careers of young talent to renew the industry. Most of the women thus helped, however, were unable to retain their foothold in the industry once they were left to the mercy of the market in a male-dominated industry. In contrast, de la Iglesia has been a filmmaker since 1993, with seven feature films under his belt: *Acción mutante/Mutant Action* (1993), *El día de la bestia/The Day of the Beast* (1995), *Perdita Durango* (1997), *Muertos de risa/Dying of Laughter* (1999), *La comunidad/Common Wealth* (2000), *800 balas/800 Bullets* (2003) and *Crimen ferpecto/Ferpect Crime* (2004). My choice of Coixet and de la Iglesia is also influenced by their ostensible positions at different ends of the spectrum of Spanish auteurs: de la Iglesia at the 'popular' and Coixet at the 'art cinema' end. Since 1995, both have been constructed by media and academic criticism as film auteurs. Coixet has aroused the curiosity of transnational film studies scholars for being an auteur working outside Spain and in English and is the object of studies focusing on gendered auteurism and postmodernism,¹⁷ while de la Iglesia has recently also become the object of academic study.¹⁸ Both directors also fulfil other prerequisites for auteur status, having been included in studies and encyclopaedic accounts of the national cinema both in Spain and abroad, and being recipients of *Goyas*.¹⁹

The US film industry plays an influential role for both: for de la Iglesia Hollywood offers the inspiration of spectacle and genre cinema (for which he is chastised); for Coixet, who draws on more prestigious European art-cinema models, inspiration comes in the guise of the so-called Independent American Cinema. Independent movies are a point of reference thematically, aesthetically and in the choice of performers (Sarah Polley, Lily Taylor and, most recently, Tim Robbins, an actor whose career straddles mainstream and independent camps and who appears in Coixet's latest film *La vida secreta de las palabras/The Secret Life of Words* [2005]). Finally, and more importantly, both directors have created significant homepages, highly elaborate and offering a variety of texts and images as well as information about their work. These sites present themselves as potentially authentic and autonomous modes of expression for the directors, as well as loci of publicity; and in the case of Coixet, it is important to note that she is a frequent award-winner and respected professional of the Spanish advertising industry.²⁰

As Corrigan pointed out in the early 1990s, film is no longer primarily consumed in cinemas, it has become an object (in various video and

17 María Cami-Vela, *Mujeres detrás de la cámara: Entrevistas con cineastas españolas de la década de los 90* (Madrid: Ocho y medio, 2005), and Valeria Camporesi, 'A ambos lados de todas las fronteras: Isabel Coixet y el cine español contemporáneo', in C. Peña and M.A. Millán (eds), *Voces y espacios femeninos* (Zaragoza: Universidad de Zaragoza, 2006).

18 Peter Buse, Nuria Triana Toribio and Andrew Willis, *The Cinema of Álex de la Iglesia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), and Jordi Sánchez Navarro, *Freaks en acción: Álex de la Iglesia o el cine como fuga* (Madrid: Calamar, 2006).

19 They both appear, for instance, in the prestigious encyclopaedic study by J. Pérez Perucha (ed.), *Antología crítica del cine español* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1997).

20 Coixet was the founder and creative director of the publicity companies *Target*, *JWT* and the production companies *Eddie Saeta* and *Miss Wasabi*. Her portfolio includes British Telecom, Ford, Danone, BMW and IKEA.

digital formats) whose value is not limited to a commercial run in theatres. In *Film Cultures* Harbord studies contemporary contexts of film production, dissemination and consumption and describes the 'afterlife of film':

Part of the argument is that film never finally arrives or is fixed at any point but, like Appadurai's phases of the commodity, enters certain windows and arenas, before moving on to the next. And not only a deferral of the arrival of the one text but its afterlife, in a range of ancillary texts as the film undergoes metamorphoses of various kinds: animated as a computer game, reformatted as video, spliced into soundtracks, miniaturized as toys.²¹

21 Harbord, *Film Cultures*, p. 5.

Harbord argues that what we are facing is not the end of cinema but the end of *going to the cinema*. The 2006 edition of *Focus*, the annual publication of the *European Audiovisual Observatory*, devoted its introduction to the subject of dwindling audiences in most world markets. André Lange, head of the Observatory's Department for Information on Markets and Financing, laments:

Is the cinema-goer becoming an endangered species, more so than the Emperor penguin? Shrinking audiences in cinema theatres constituted a global phenomenon in 2005 – in the United States figures were down 8.7% compared with 2004, and the corresponding figures elsewhere were -11.4% in the European Union, -21.7% in Brazil, -10.2% in Australia, and -5.7% in Japan. . . . Such a drop in numbers in most of the world's major markets is naturally worrying, and not easy to analyze.²²

22 André Lange, 'A species in greater danger than the Emperor penguin?', in *European Audiovisual Observatory, Focus 2006*, p. 5.

This is the context in which the director's official homepage is a versatile invention that can survive the decline of cinemagoing and accommodate the 'afterlife of film' that Harbord describes. It is put to use in the promotion of the film as a product to be consumed in cinemas and elsewhere. Directors' webpages may be used for what Corrigan calls "mak[ing]" the film before it is actually made, either through the promise of a particular star or group of stars, rumours of spectacular new technologies, or astonishing production costs'.²³ Visiting Almodóvar's homepage during the Spanish release of *Volver* in March 2006 allowed users to witness the process by which the production company creates demand for a film at the all-important moment of its initial release, through interviews, images and music.

23 Corrigan, *A Cinema Without Walls*, p. 12.

Websites also have a versatility that allows them to be consulted by consumers of cultural goods and services and contributes to the construction and perpetuation of auteurism by displaying filmmakers' opinions and details of their oeuvre. As David Bordwell affirms, in his classic if somewhat reductive observation: 'Directors' statements of intent guide comprehension of the film, while a body of work linked to an authorial signature encourages viewers to read each film as a chapter of an entire oeuvre'.²⁴

24 David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 211.

25 Harbord, *Film Cultures*, p. 48.

26 'Clicks-and-mortar' designates physical stores integrated with online activity. See, for instance, Barry Wellman and Caroline Haythornthwaite (eds), *The Internet in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 7. FNAC, the enormously successful French multinational company of cultural goods and services, was created in 1954 and has sixty-seven shops in its native France where it belongs to the consortium of companies PRP (Pinault-Printemps-Redoute), one of the main world traders in luxury items and non-food goods. It started its Spanish and Portuguese operations in 1993. At the time of writing, it had twelve shops in Spain, seven in Portugal (Lisbon), six in Belgium, Brazil and Taiwan, four in Switzerland and five in Italy and was about to open new sites in Murcia, Bilbao and Seville.

27 Clemente Corona, editor-in-chief at ClubCultura, confirmed in an interview carried out by email (25/08/06) that *Clubcultura* is an initiative exclusive to FNAC España, even if it features cultural products in Spanish from Latin America.

28 ¿Qué es clubcultura? URL: <http://www.clubcultura.com/servicios/quees.php?PHPSESSID=a9c9cd1e0d65baca408080fac5ae> [accessed 6 July 2008].

29 Harbord, *Film Cultures*, p. 76.

Before I analyze Coixet's and de la Iglesia's homepages, it is important to contextualize their location, because these are sites hosted not by film producers or distributors but by FNAC, a transnational retailer of cultural goods and services; in short, they are hosted by a business that will benefit from that afterlife of film which Harbord and Corrigan see as a present-future of film as object and related to other objects with which it maintains an intertextual relation: 'the soundtrack, the video and DVD and the computer game'.²⁵

FNAC is one of the enterprises that benefits most from changes in film culture and it makes sense that the internet auteurism should be closely linked to the milieu in which future film culture may be centrally located. These homepages are housed within the 'clicks-and-mortar' environment of FNAC, immersed in its Spanish initiative ClubCultura.com.²⁶ ClubCultura is composed of an inhouse cultural magazine (retailing at two euros), published bimonthly by FNAC España, and ClubCultura.com, a website which complements the magazine and reproduces some of its content.²⁷ The team that put together the magazine and the internet content explain in their page ¿Qué es ClubCultura.com? the objectives of their activities and introduce the service they offer to Spanish-speaking users. This declaration of principles tells us much about their criteria in hosting Coixet's and de la Iglesia's homepages:

ClubCultura is an initiative of FNAC Spain conceived as a meeting point for the most relevant authors of Ibero-American culture on the internet and a showcase of the most internationally-renowned works of literature, cinema, music, photography and graphic humour. [We choose] according to criteria of artistic transcendence, independence from commercial whims, and placing an emphasis on finding a balance between the key authors in the different artistic fields and new talent, and holding cultural diversity as a standard.

In the ClubCultura portal are located the official pages of some of the most important creative talents in our culture: Pedro Almodóvar, Alejandro Amenábar.²⁸

Harbord suggests that there are two models of film marketing. 'Benign' marketing describes 'the provision of information about film, an increasingly important function in a saturated marketplace'.²⁹ This 'benign' model is the one invoked by the contributors to the debate in *Enfoque* described at the start of this essay: González Macho and Trueba argued that what was missing was information for audiences about what is available to fill their screens, and that such information would translate itself into a demand at the time of release. They played down the notion of 'selling' during the debate by arguing that what audiences need is simply information about national production. At times, indeed, these contributors to the television debate seemed more concerned about addressing the audience's ignorance than in making films cost effective.

An internet site is a better place than most to make this information available, as even if the main purpose of the internet is to provide communication through email,

The internet's other main use is for seeking information, e.g., hobby, medical, sports, travel, news or product information. Long-time users, new users, non users and former users all rank this activity as number one or two as a reason for being online. . . . The UCLA report (UCLA CCP 2000) found that two thirds of users consider the internet an important or extremely important source of information.³⁰

Moreover, ClubCultura's declared intention as a platform for cultural products in Spanish is to permit the 'cultural flow'³¹ of Ibero-American culture, and the internet seems ideally equipped to allow such flow. As part of this benign interpretation I want to suggest that ClubCultura's provision and organization of information has its effects: this initiative sets out to provide cultural capital for free regardless of the clients' educational capital and, in so doing, creates value for its users. The right-hand sidebar in its portal announces: 'Register in ClubCultura.com, Privileged Cultural Information, Totally FREE'.³² It is telling that ClubCultura uses the word 'privileged', because the appeal of these pages is bound up with concepts of taste and distinction in a country that is obviously organized in terms of class but in which the 'privileges' of education and access to middle-class culture were closed to many until the 1960s, and even then restricted by the dictatorship's censorship and lack of funding. Culture became big business in the 1980s and so did cultural consumption.³³

Pierre Bourdieu tells us that 'The whole relationship of the petite bourgeoisie to culture can in a sense be deduced from the considerable gap between knowledge and recognition' and that 'the rising petite bourgeoisie invests its good intentions in the minor forms of the legitimate cultural goods and practices'.³⁴

ClubCultura offers to reduce that gap with information about authors or directors whose names we know but whose films and or novels we may not. ClubCultura's marketing strategies would not exist were not the Spanish *pequeña burguesía* (petit bourgeoisie) 'filled with reverence for culture'³⁵ and with a desire to access what their parents' generation could not. FNAC expects that the *pequeño burgués* and *burguesa* will put their money where their good intentions are, and once they have reduced the information gap, will buy the book or the DVD.

The entire enterprise of ClubCultura can be read as a middle-brow venture. It organizes cultural information and effects an artistic canonization through criteria that are designed to appeal to middle-brow taste. For instance, the possibility of discerning 'new creative talent' is put to work in the section 'ClubCine' via a link to the San Sebastian International Film Festival's section *Cine en construcción* (Cinema in progress). This is an initiative from Spain's most prestigious Film Festival to encourage new projects, particularly from Latin America.

30 Wellman and Haythornthwaite (eds), *The Internet in Everyday Life*, p. 19.

31 Arjun Appadurai's term for the travel of culture across borders, in his *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 27–47.

32 ¿Qué es clubcultura?

33 Emma Dent Coad, 'Artist patronage and enterprise culture', in Helen Graham and Jo Labanyi (eds), *Spanish Popular Studies: an Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 373–80.

34 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1986), p. 319.

35 Ibid., p. 321.

36 Ibid., p. 323.

37 Harbord, *Film Cultures*, p. 76.

38 ¿Qué es clubcultura?

39 The Latin American filmmakers featured in *Cine en construcción* are an exception as their careers are not all well established. However, *Cine en construcción* is a solid enterprise backed by the *Grupo Buesa*, and supported by institutions such as *Ateliers du Cinéma Européen*, *Instituto Cervantes* and film festivals of Spanish and Latin American cinema such as Toulouse (France). It has become over the last ten years, an established and prestigious launch pad for work in progress. URL: <http://www.clubcultura.com/cineenconstruccion/quees.html> [accessed 8 July 2008].

40 Harbord, *Film Cultures*, p. 76.

Cine en construcción has become synonymous with aesthetic exploration and adopting a critical stance towards the reality in Latin America, and having a link in ClubCultura provides 'the accessible versions of avant-garde experiments' that Bourdieu indicates appeal to middle-brow taste.³⁶ More conservative criteria of 'artistic transcendence', with its implied promise of a pedagogic ranking or canonical categorization by experts, suggest a middle-brow standard.

So far so 'benign', but returning to Harbord we find that 'the second reading of marketing renders it as a type of duplicity, always promising more and offering less'.³⁷ It is in this light that I want to read ClubCultura's claims about its criteria with a more critical edge:

We choose according to criteria of artistic transcendence, independence from commercial whims, and placing an emphasis on finding a balance between the key authors in the different artistic fields and new talent, and holding cultural diversity as a standard.³⁸

The first thought that comes from reading ClubCultura's list of canonical filmmakers – Pedro Almodóvar, Alejandro Amenábar, Bigas Luna, Isabel Coixet, Álex de la Iglesia, Gutiérrez Alea, Gutiérrez Aragón, Carlos Saura, Gonzalo Suárez and Fernando Trueba – is that, in most cases, criteria of 'artistic transcendence' and 'cultural diversity' are interpreted in a very conservative manner: all the filmmakers listed in the sidebar are 'safe bets' from a *commercial* point of view, none of them marginal but central to the hegemonic discourse about cinema in Spanish. They are almost all Spanish (the only Latin American presence is the late Cuban director Gutiérrez Alea) and with the exception of Coixet all male, which implies little regard for diversity and makes the inclusion of Coixet intriguing.³⁹ Some are firmly placed in the legitimate camp of culture as long-established objects of academic research: Saura, Bigas Luna, Gutiérrez Alea. The same criteria can be applied to Almodóvar's and Amenábar's inclusion, even if their entitlement to 'artistic transcendence' within Spain, where critics perceive them as too commercial or too postmodern, is sometimes still disputed.

Certainly, ClubCultura's main objective is providing information, as indicated above, and implied in this is the suggestion that surfing through ClubCultura or reading the magazine will augment your cultural capital because they showcase everything there is. These claims divert our attention from the main objective of the marketing strategy at the heart of the initiative, which is to create a lack that needs to be filled by purchasing, or as Harbord would put it: 'It masks the intention to sell with the promise of personal gain: marketing appeals to nuanced differences of multicultural, plural societies but this is no more than a veneer for a product which fails to speak to social diversity'.⁴⁰ ClubCultura implies that it puts consumers in touch with what is really worth knowing, not simply what they want, and are able, to sell. Arjun Appadurai comments on comparable strategies: 'These images of agency are increasing distortions of a world of merchandising so subtle that the

41 Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, p. 42.

consumer is consistently helped to believe that he or she is an actor, where in fact she is at best a chooser'.⁴¹

However, in spite of these reservations about the enterprise, it is not my aim in this essay to censure FNAC as a host or ClubCultura as a platform – ultimately this is an e-commerce website located in a capitalist first-world country. What really interests me about ClubCultura is that it provides a showcase for a cinema which, by its own admission, is in need of various forms of marketing, and that in the course of going about its publicity business creates a number of interesting side-effects of the 'cultural-aesthetic' variety, such as the perpetuation of auteurism. It provides a forum for discussion of the auteur's work (and worth) by its audience and for reflection by the auteurs on their craft, their position in society and the place that they assign themselves among their peers. These homepages occupy a crucial interstitial position in the flow of film between makers and audiences; they have a role in film publicity and advertising; they occupy a space between consumers and products. My emphasis so far has been on their role as a shop window for directors, films and other objects that come under the definition of the 'afterlife of film'. In parallel to this function, however, these sites also contribute to the perpetuation of auteurism. Such marketing tools are thus paradoxical: in promoting filmmakers as auteurs they undermine the usual romantic view of authorship by presenting it as a marketing device, a way of organizing the merchandise. Corrigan argues that this paradox defines contemporary auteurs. Their struggle is to perform a dual role. On the one hand, they are a function of marketing strategy; on the other, their stardom conveys the illusion that they are indeed agents:

Placed before, after, and outside a film text and in effect usurping the work of that text and its reception, today's auteurs are agents, who whether they wish it or not, are always on the verge of being consumed by their status as stars. By this I am not suggesting merely some brand of egotism or self-marketing posture but that the binary distinctions that once formulated most models of auteurist expression against textual organization have collapsed into what Dana Polan has called, in a larger context, the postmodern 'evacuation of sense'.⁴²

42 Corrigan, *A Cinema Without Walls*, p. 106.

Looking at the homepages of de la Iglesia and Coixet, we find how each site plays this out. At first sight, these homepages present themselves as a locus of authentic/autonomous modes of expression for the directors in which new areas of their creativity and personas can surface. Indeed, their hosts at ClubCultura are keen to point out that they provide auteurs with creative freedom. Clemente Corona, chief editor of ClubCultura, emphasizes that de la Iglesia and Coixet are the sole authors and, in agreement with ClubCultura, have free rein in choosing content.⁴³

43 Corona in interview by email.

Both auteurs thus come across as unique and different, fleshing out their 'individuality' through a back story (both homepages have

biographies which construct the details of their lives in a manner consistent with each director's star persona). Both express their personalities in lists of likes and dislikes: de la Iglesia recommends cultural products via his interventions in the *foro* (a chat facility that allows the director to interact online), whilst Coixet's 'intellectual but quirky' preferences are displayed in a section tellingly called *Pistas* (Clues), as if to add an element of playfulness and intrigue to the construction of 'Coixet the auteur'.

The written texts of their pages are equally informative. In the case of de la Iglesia's page, these appear in a section called *Diario*, in which he provides a total of fifty texts of different lengths and on different topics, while Coixet does the same in '*Miss Wasabi: Su alter ego escribe sobre canciones, barbacoas e incendios*' (Miss Wasabi: her alter ego writes about songs, barbecues and fires). Before examining these texts more closely, I also want to note other ways in which these webpages are used to construct the directors' individuality, such as their choice of colour palette. Red, black and white, juxtaposed in strong contrast, predominate in de la Iglesia's background and illustrations. This choice is consistent with the design of the film posters for his most successful films, particularly *El día de la bestia*, and compatible with his persona as a cult director of genre films. Grey is the colour of choice in Coixet's pages, and it is used in various different shades with the occasional splash of bright yellow, giving the pages a neutral and harmonious look. Coixet's palette is not dictated by an existing strong corporate image, as is the case with de la Iglesia's predominantly bold red, but it appears sufficiently neutral and unobtrusive to accommodate any avenue that her future projects may adopt.

Corona explains that at present issues of copyright and technology do not allow these homepages to provide facilities for downloading the directors' feature films, but that this situation could change in the not-too-distant future.⁴⁴ However, users do have access to other visual material created by Coixet and de la Iglesia, material which also contributes to their individualization as auteurs and to the layering of their star personas, since the elements of their oeuvre that are available on their sites contribute to the place they occupy as auteurs in the context of Spanish cinema, as I will discuss later. De la Iglesia offers *cortos* (short films) and Coixet's page contains *music videos* and *spots* (television adverts).

I will return first, though, to the written texts. The section entitled 'Diary' in de la Iglesia's page presents links to around fifty texts of different lengths. Featured within it is a smaller section of twelve texts, five of these entitled 'Diary of a neurasthenic'. These snippets do not illustrate any of de la Iglesia's films in particular but often refer to the filmmaking process (particularly distribution and promotional travels); texts such as 'Castings!!!!!!' and 'Castings en el Caribe' are, in fact, calls for volunteers to play extras in *Crimen perfecto*.⁴⁵ In 'Pies Negros, Lee

44 Corona in interview by email.

45 *Casting en el Caribe*/Casting in the Caribbean. URL: <http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/delaiglesia/alexpresentabase.php?id=101> [accessed 8 July 2008].

Harvey and Shultz' he tells his readers about seeking finance in Hollywood during 2005:

We continue negotiations with the Americans. I am not sure exactly what we are doing, whether we are selling our soul or just a percentage of it. It is the second time I visit Amblin's offices at Universal. Third time lucky, they say.⁴⁶

One of the main themes running through these texts is filmmaking as the auteur's obsession. Some texts follow closely the intricacies of pre- and post-shooting stages for *800 balas* and *Crimen perfecto*: reading the script, choosing music, and so on. The reader is often invited to imagine that these writings have been produced by the more or less disturbed mind of a 'genius' in the throes of creative frenzy:

5. Absurd Text Before Going to Bed

My god! I am a month and a bit into the shooting of this fucking craziness. . . . My wife awaits in our bedroom, the baby is asleep, I should go up . . . but I stay writing this, I don't know for whom, to send it to that absurdity of the web. Is this worth it? Yes, damn, it is. Even if no one understands it. Even if I regret that easy tactic of seeking your complicity.⁴⁷

The obsessive tendency of the auteur persona that these texts highlight is that of the 'pure filmmaker', a filmmaker for whom nothing but cinema exists. There is even a text in which de la Iglesia writes candidly about the lack of boundaries between him and his work: 'This script that I have written is my life',⁴⁸ evidence of a traditional auteurist strategy at work in which, as Bordwell argues: 'the institutional "author" is available as a source of the formal operation of the film. Sometimes the film asks to be taken as autobiography, the filmmaker's confession.'⁴⁹

This all-consuming filmmakers' persona is barely tempered by the frequent allusions to his hands-on fatherhood: 'I spend all my free time changing nappies and trying to stop one of my daughters from taking out the eye of the other'.⁵⁰ In 'Through the looking glass' he even argues that family life may be an illusion, as opposed to the real world of filmmaking. The role of these sentences is two-fold. On the one hand, they reaffirm the 'compulsive filmmaker' side of de la Iglesia's auteur persona, a side highly compatible with his status as a cult, genre filmmaker. On the other hand, bringing shards of his family life to the fore has the effect of placing somewhere in the construction the image of de la Iglesia as an average Spanish male.

The filmmakers' webpages make it easy to create and perpetuate a cult of personality around individual auteurs. The diary format that de la Iglesia uses only reinforces this tendency. The texts relate what seem to be the 'unmediated' thoughts, fears and madness of the filmmaker: 'I think my mental state is rather pitiful', he declares in 'Fear and loathing in my head'.⁵¹ The diary is a format that traditionally conveys the idea of intimacy and sincerity: 'that's what comes from being honest

46 Pies Negros, Lee Harvey and Shultz/ Black Feet, Lee Harvey and Shultz. URL: <http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/delaiglesia/alexpresentabase.php?id=111> [accessed 8 July 2008].

47 *Texto absurdo antes de acostarme*/Absurd text before going to bed. URL: <http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/delaiglesia/alexpresenta05.htm> [accessed 8 July 2008].

48 *Diario de un neurasténico*/Diary of a neurasthenic. URL: <http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/delaiglesia/alexpresenta012.htm> [accessed 8 July 2008].

49 Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 211.

50 *Al otro lado del espejo*/Through the looking glass. URL: <http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/delaiglesia/alexpresentabase.php?id=85> [accessed 8 July 2008].

51 *Miedo y asco en mi cabeza*/Fear and loathing in my head. URL: <http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/delaiglesia/alexpresentabase.php?id=62> [accessed 8 July 2008].

52 *El ataque de los productores austrohúngaros*/The attack of Austro-Hungarian producers. URL: <http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/delaiglesia/alexpresentabase.php?id=66> [accessed 8 July 2008].

53 Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, p. 19.

54 *El foro de la discordia*/The forum of discord. URL: <http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/delaiglesia/alexpresentabase.php?id=64> [accessed 8 July 2008].

55 de la Iglesia in interview by email, 10 July 2006.

56 *El armagedón se acerca*/Armageddon is getting closer. URL: <http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/delaiglesia/alexpresentabase.php?id=76> [accessed 8 July 2008].

57 Paula Ponga 'Historia de 6 debutantes', *Fotogramas*, no. 1784 (April 1992), pp. 94–5.

in my diary', he confesses in 'The producers' attack . . .'.⁵² Posting a diary on the internet, a medium which is, in theory, widely available to many unknown users and that permits a dissemination beyond the control of the author, seems contradictory with the intimacy which the diary format implies. However, in order to understand the role of 'Diary of a neurasthenic' and other such webpage texts we have to consider the contradictory environment in which this activity takes place. It is an environment that Appadurai reminds us can reconcile two seemingly exclusive practices:

The world we live in now seems rhizomic (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) even schizophrenic, calling for theories of rootlessness, alienation and psychological distance between individuals and groups on the one hand and fantasies (or nightmares) of electronic propinquity on the other.⁵³

Appadurai's observations predate the internet but are prescient: the practice of blogging, keeping an internet diary, has conventionalized this strategy and public intimacy is no longer an oxymoron. The combination of intimacy and wide dissemination created by address via diary enables de la Iglesia to indulge in fantasies (or nightmares) of electronic propinquity. Some texts indicate an auteur persona that mingles and even merges with the fans, even at the risk of losing his own identity as an auteur or as the individual who inhabits the auteur position: 'since I have not been writing much in the forum people forget who one is and even think that one is not one'.⁵⁴

The forum, the online discussion facility available in de la Iglesia's homepage, with its implied possibility of real-time conversations with fans, is one of the most interesting features that the website provides and that older forms of commercialization and construction of auteurism could not rely upon. De la Iglesia declares that he is a frequent user of this forum and considers it as one of the most important reasons for having a homepage.⁵⁵ Via the *foro*, conversation and contact with the auteur exist as a possibility, almost an imposition, but the auteur can choose to be 'not him' and he speaks of *mi yo cibernético* (my cyber-I). This leads to interesting subsidiary effects since he uses several 'I's: 'Hello, here is the true Álex de la Iglesia . . . there is an impostor who has managed to infiltrate my *sancta sanctorum* . . . but we'll let him be. A good enemy defines you'.⁵⁶ This adoption of multiple personalities in the forum confirms the cult of personality rather than leaving it in disarray, since adopting several 'I's only encourages the playful component of de la Iglesia's star persona and has little other implication for his construction as auteur. Indeed, it reminds fans of de la Iglesia's origins: in his first interviews he appeared covered in bandages, like an invisible man, in what was both a publicity stunt and an avoidance of identification.⁵⁷

Moreover, this refusal to be specific about his identity has another function in suturing his persona to a pre-internet de la Iglesia. He has always argued that filmmaking is a team activity and often blurred the

58 *Las hordas del absurdo receden*/
The hordes of absurdity recede.
URL: [http://
www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/
clubcineastas/delaiglesia/
alexpresentabase.php?id= 82](http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/delaiglesia/alexpresentabase.php?id= 82)
[accessed 8 July 2008].

59 *Vuelve la bestia*/The beast is
back. URL: [http://
www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/
clubcineastas/delaiglesia/
alexpresenta.php?id= 97](http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/delaiglesia/alexpresenta.php?id= 97)
[accessed 8 July 2008].

60 See, for example, Marcos
Ordóñez, *La bestia anda suelta*:
Álex de la Iglesia lo cuenta todo
(Barcelona: Glenat, 1997).

61 Bridget Fowler, *Pierre Bourdieu
and Cultural Theory* (London:
Sage, 1997), p. 18.

boundaries between his and his collaborators' work in expounding on films. In accordance, he switches in the website between the first persons singular and plural: for instance, 'I speak for my team', he writes in 'The hordes of absurdity recede'.⁵⁸

Another facet which the homepage presents and which is consistent with a pre-internet persona is that of the filmmaker against the critics, and against the type of filmmaking considered desirable for the national cinema. Through processes like the annual prizegiving ceremony of the *Goyas*, Spanish cinema as an institution functions as gatekeeper of its production and declares what films are considered *necesarios* (necessary). De la Iglesia's films have won *Goyas* but mainly in the categories of acting and special effects, and they are up against a preference for genre and spectacle. The best film awards tend to be conferred on films whose topics indicate an engagement with current problems (the sequels of the war in the Balkans in *La vida secreta de las palabras*, winner in 2006) or an awareness of the pressing concerns of Spanish society (violence against women was the topic addressed by the 2005 winner *Te doy mis ojos*/Take My Eyes [Icía Bollain, 2004]). Moreover, the *Goyas* award ceremony took on an openly political role opposing the rightwing *Partido Popular* government, particularly in 2003 when it coincided with the eve of the highly unpopular attack against Iraq by a coalition of primarily US and UK forces which included Spanish soldiers. De la Iglesia's only openly political comment on the webpages is on the futility of demonstrating against this war. Spanish film professionals declared their abhorrence by wearing stickers protesting against it, but de la Iglesia predicts gloomily: 'The war is about to start and all the stickers in the world won't change that'.⁵⁹

These comments have to be interpreted within a stance of apoliticism at a distance from the positions adopted by those who practise and encourage engaged cinema. Unlike Coixet, as I will show later, it would not be consistent with de la Iglesia's star persona to project an image of the auteur as a cultural/social commentator. De la Iglesia frequently constructs himself, and is constructed by critics, in contrast to the desired *autor comprometido* (politically engaged auteur), as an immature and playful adolescent—adult battling with boredom.⁶⁰

So far I have focused on how de la Iglesia provides a back story, distinguishing the features that assert his individuality and fleshing out his uniqueness as auteur through his texts and his dialogue with fans. Another way in which filmmaker homepages contribute to this process is by being the place where the auteur tells us about his or her taste, or more precisely by being the locus of *habitus*. Bourdieu tells us that consumption is controlled by *habitus*, a key concept in his analyses and which, as Bridget Fowler notes, 'has been variously defined in Bourdieu's theory but it is put most simply in *Reproduction* as [the] system of schemes of . . . perception, thought, appreciation and action which are durable and transposable'.⁶¹ De la Iglesia gives his preferences in food, music, literature and leisure activities a prominent role in the

62 Fritz Lang, *Paramount y Mutis*/Fritz Lang, Paramount and Mutis. URL: <http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/delaiglesia/alexpresentabase.php?id=110> [accessed 8 July 2008].

63 *Por fin, la aventura!*/The adventure at last! URL: <http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/delaiglesia/alexpresenta08.htm> [accessed 8 July 2008].

64 *Mezclas herméticas al amanecer*/Hermetic mixes at dawn. URL: <http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/delaiglesia/alexpresentabase.php?id=89> [accessed 8 July 2008].

65 Sánchez Navarro, *Freaks en acción*, p. 9.

66 *La Marea*/The tide. URL: <http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/delaiglesia/alexpresentabase.php?id=100> [accessed 8 July 2008].

67 Jean-Paul Sartre [1948], *What is Literature?*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (London: Routledge, 1998).

68 What are films for? URL: <http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/isabelcoixet/wassabi.htm> [accessed 8 July 2008].

construction of a persona and thereby enables his readers to interpret the system of schemes that guide his choices and engender a sense of marginality from a serious, respectable creative world.

De la Iglesia's homepage describes his engagement in leisure activities such as playing 'dungeons and dragons' with participants in the forum and his preference for texts that emphasize escapism and popular entertainment. He shares with his readers and members of the forum an interest in television series such as *Lost* (ABC, 2004-) and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (HBO, 2001-).⁶² In the same piece, he expresses his admiration for Fritz Lang and in 'The adventure at last!' he praises Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings I: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001).⁶³ Other treasured cultural objects are the classic Spiderman comics and the *Star Wars* films.⁶⁴ Through emphasizing his taste for entertainment, escapism and popular culture he reinforces a direct connection with his fans, seamlessly continuing the one created by his oeuvre. As Sánchez Navarro explains: 'Álex de la Iglesia has connected with a group of cultural consumers for whom television, superhero comics . . . genre cinema, Hitchcock and *Star Wars* are an essential part of contemporary culture'.⁶⁵ De la Iglesia also gives webpage users indications of his taste in food, going so far as to boast that he has 'A FUCKING AMAZING GASTRONOMIC CULTURE'.⁶⁶ This is his only explicit claim to expertise in any area and reinforces the overall emphasis on hedonism, escapism and the distrust of political or social engagement.

The auteur persona of Coixet emerges with equal clarity from the twenty-three texts on her website. As I already noted, she is a filmmaker who inhabits a very different position to those available to most film auteurs in Spanish cinema. She is more identified with the European art-cinema model that projects like the *Decreto Miró* sought to create and which is, for many of the newspaper and specialized magazine critics, still the desired model for Spanish auteurs, the model that de la Iglesia spurns. However, to this hegemonic template Coixet brings distinctiveness in the shape of an appropriation of Independent American Cinema styles and themes. The first text in her section *Miss Wasabi* is entitled 'What are films for?' The title clearly echoes Jean-Paul Sartre's *What is Literature?* and his reflections on the relationship between artistic production and political commitment.⁶⁷

I have always carried out my craft as filmmaker in the midst of a contradictory state of mind; together with the pure enthusiasm that the act of shooting itself gives me comes the certainty that films do not change the world, nor transform consciousness, nor make life more bearable: the repressed belief that films are useless. For the first time I have proof that a film is useful, it comforts, it helps someone to understand what goes on . . . it helps someone to live.⁶⁸

The language used – 'change the world', 'transform consciousness' or 'helps someone to understand what goes on' – is the language of the *artista comprometido* (engaged artist). However, this defence of useful

art that helps in our understanding of the world comes from someone whose films do not belong to *cine social* (social cinema), are not set in Spain, and are frequently in English.

Coixet has often declared that she wants to reach audiences beyond Spain and the Spanish-speaking world. Accordingly, the texts in the section *Miss Wasabi* are transnational in their preoccupations and activism. For instance, she calls for action in helping *Medicins sans frontières* to fight against disease⁶⁹ and encourages her readers to watch a recent documentary on the subject of exploitation in Africa.⁷⁰

If 'What are films for?' functions as a manifesto for her choice of career and confers on her certain distinguishing features as auteur, 'That object called Patria' adds two significant layers to that auteur persona.⁷¹ This is a text in which Coixet complains about being pigeonholed by critics and audiences on account of her gender and her nationality. Coixet is a woman filmmaker and a Catalan filmmaker and this text accounts for the tug-of-war in her creative agency that the double interpellation of gender and nation provokes. Both as a woman and as a Catalan she is placed as a member of groups that have traditionally not had access to means of cultural expression, particularly to cinema, or who have had their national cultures crushed by Francoism. In this contradictory 'manifesto' she acknowledges that both circumstances dictate the way her work is received but defends her choice not to make films about female topics or about Catalonia, in Catalonia or in Catalan:

At the beginning of my career all the questions were about my being a woman, later to these were added questions about Catalan and Spanish language. I honestly do not believe that any of these questions is relevant when it comes to appreciate my films. I don't want to suggest with this affirmation that films should not have a particular gender and origins. No one leaves their gender or nationality in the changing room when going to work.

She continues by explaining that she does not believe there is such a thing as 'female films' ('are there exclusively female topics?') and arguing that it would be easier for her to concentrate on the familiar: themes and characters who share her nationality and gender. The same 'lack of challenge', she declares, leads her away from films in her 'native language', 'in Catalan or Spanish and [shot] around the corner'.

For this essay, this text has a crucial function as an expression of autonomy and idiosyncrasy. Coixet uses her website to explain professional choices of topics, style and genre that distinguish her from other women filmmakers and from other Catalan filmmakers. She refuses to be a spokesperson for her gender and nation and her website is a place for her to justify her strategy, reclaim agency and promote her work as distinctive. Because ClubCultura does not interfere in the content of these texts, her homepage provides a unique opportunity to pre-empt questions that journalists have not yet posed but that she thinks they might – or should. In doing so, Coixet reveals much about the

69 Chagas's silence. URL: <http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/isabelcoixet/wassabi012.htm> [accessed 8 July 2008].

70 12 euros per kilo. URL: <http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/isabelcoixet/wassabi.htm> [accessed 8 July 2008].

71 That object called Patria. URL: <http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/isabelcoixet/wassabi13.htm> [accessed 8 July 2008].

contradictory place that as auteur she inhabits in her filmmaking context: she claims agency as auteur but implies that she has to make 'responsible' choices and engage in 'worthy' themes.

The texts in *Miss Wasabi* also showcase Coixet's literary culture. She quotes John Berger, Antonio Gramsci and Stendhal to support her opinions. If films are praised they invariably belong to European art cinema or critically acclaimed world cinema. Mainstream Hollywood cinema is alluded to in a story about the negative effects it supposedly has on audiences: 'In Philadelphia, a couple of boys have killed a Korean man . . . after having seen three consecutive times the latest installment of *The Matrix*'.⁷²

These texts are not presented as entries in a diary; they are essays of different length focusing on various topics. The desire for intimacy or chumminess expressed in de la Iglesia's pages is absent from Coixet's, although the mode of address is relaxed and accessible. If there is an area in which she seeks complicity from her website users it is in the part of her homepage dedicated to recommended 'products'. In a more obvious and recurrent manner than de la Iglesia, Coixet uses 'Clues' to showcase her *habitus* by displaying an accumulation of cultural preferences, a mixture of 'high', 'low' and 'middle-brow' objects: novels in English (not in translation) combine with jars of fried onion from the popular Catalan supermarket chain *Mercadona*.⁷³ There is a predominance of literary texts in her favourite objects and some of the books provide a link to the FNAC shopping site, reinforcing the image of her work and persona as part of a literary cultural environment. However, as Camporesi explains, this categorization is tempered by her 'other' profession as a designer and director of television campaigns which display a familiarity with digital technology and distance her from traditional 'literary' filmmakers whose references are the 1960s and 1970s new cinemas and the avant garde:

If we put this in terms of the history of world cinema, her passion for books and literature places her somewhere very close to Truffaut, but her likelihood of frequenting media far removed from the mythic celluloid cinema and 35 mm distances her from the 'book-men', and places her closer to someone like Tim Burton, for instance.⁷⁴

Her 'other profession' in the world of publicity is far from hidden in her personal homepage. It features in her biography and there are links on the website to her most famous adverts.⁷⁵ As her website makes clear, then, her oeuvre consists not merely of feature films but includes her 'menial work', and as Camporesi explains in her study of the filmmaker: 'Coixet is not interested in presenting herself as split between bread-and-butter and more personal projects'.⁷⁶ Traditional auteurist studies accorded little or no importance to the bread-and-butter jobs directors had alongside feature filmmaking. For instance, studies of 1970s Spanish auteurs such as Víctor Erice⁷⁷ did not look for the authorial signature in the many adverts that he made for Spain's then only channel

72 Symptoms. URL: <http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/isabelcoixet/wassabi02.htm> [accessed 8 July 2008].

73 Clues. URL: <http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/isabelcoixet/pistas.htm> [accessed 9 June 2006].

74 Camporesi, 'A ambos lados', n.p.

75 Spots. URL: <http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/isabelcoixet/spots.htm> [accessed 8 July 2008].

76 Camporesi, 'A ambos lados', n.p.

77 John Hopewell, *Out of the Past: Spanish Cinema After Franco* (London: British Film Institute, 1986), pp. 203–14.

⁷⁸ According to Juan Antonio Pérez Millán, Pilar Miró's involvement in television had the effect of discouraging producers from funding her projects for feature films in the 1970s and early 1980s. See Juan Antonio Pérez Millán, *Pilar Miró: Directora de Cine* (Valladolid: Semana Internacional de Cine de Valladolid, 1992), pp. 62–3.

⁷⁹ Corrigan, *A Cinema Without Walls*, p. 101.

Televisión Española, since any involvement in television tainted a filmmaker's reputation, as the cases of Pilar Miró and Josefina Molina demonstrate.⁷⁸

At the start of this essay I stated that the Spanish cinema industry needs to create showcases for its product to counter the saturated screens of Spain and the fierce competition with the US majors and other European cinemas. Coixet's and de la Iglesia's homepages are marketing their films with the help of their status as *autores mediáticos* as a central concern. Firmly located within the globalized and transnational contexts of filmmaking in which Spanish cinema now operates, these homepages have responded to the need for publicizing their directors' products, thus becoming multi-tasking marketing tools. In the process of carrying out their publicity business they attempt to reconcile the paradoxes surrounding authorship in Spanish cinema. They foster the cult of personality on which traditional auteurism rests while at the same time making this individuality accessible to the wider public. Is the future of auteurism e-auteurism? As Corrigan declares, auteurism is, if anything, adaptable, and wherever films are marketed auteurism will surely follow.⁷⁹

Music video, songs, sound: experience, technique and emotion in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*

CAROL VERNALLIS

Since the early 1990s critics have been complaining that films look like music videos, and indeed close study of this ‘low art’ can help to explain contemporary film. The new visual elements in Hollywood cinema that David Bordwell identifies (such as bipolar extremes of lens-lengths, a reliance on close shots, wide-ranging camera movements and rapid editing¹) have long been central to the music video genre because they illuminate musical form. Free-ranging camera movements like dollying, handheld, reframing and crane shots reflect music’s flowing, processual nature; blocks of image highlight song structure; intense colourization illuminates features like a song’s harmony, sectional divisions and timbre; visual motifs speak to musical ones; editing and editing-like effects such as strobing, flash frames and superimpositions not only show off the song’s rhythmic strata but also function to switch among elements (narrative, dance, lyrics, hooks) letting none take the upper hand. Music videos foreground unpredictable teleology and ambiguous endings.

Why does this aesthetic appear in the cinema now? Economics, production practices and technological developments all contribute. Bordwell argues that technologies are the most crucial: for example, avid editing, where, as Geuens puts it, ‘images are but colorful rectangles sharing a flat space’;² ProTools and Logic with their 240 tracks and zoom functions to modify the millisecond; digital intermediary, which allows visual areas to be clustered in groups, and connections to be made both across time and instantaneously with the soundtrack. 5.1 surround sound

¹ David Bordwell calls this style ‘intensified continuity’ in *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 120–21.

² Ibid., p. 147; Jean-Pierre Geuens, ‘The grand style’, *Film Quarterly*, vol. 58, no. 4 (2005), p. 27.

3 Though the internet makes gauging music video's current influence difficult, we should not forget that videos were once frequent viewing and topics of conversation and their effects have come to fruition. Music video's production practices are similarly central to intensified aesthetics. Since the early 1980s, music video directors have tended to film lots of footage with high shooting-to-editing ratios, use an array of camera techniques, drag the most gripping images onto the timeline, edit playfully and freely, cut and remix the soundtrack, and then re-colourtime, calibrate, and generally fine-tune the image to the soundtrack, all at a breakneck pace to follow the song's path up the pop charts. But the *aesthetics* of music video count equally. First on video, film and now digitally, directors produce vast amounts of imagery within a hothouse environment densely saturated with experimentation. Technologies often appear in music video before they break into film: David Fincher's burrowing snorkel camera appeared in his Steve Winwood video 'Roll with It' before his film *Fight Club* (1999).

4 Music video directors who have moved to film include Jonas Akerlund, Michael Bay, Antoine Fuqua, Jonathan Glazer, Gary Gray, Michel Gondry, Francis Lawrence, Marcus Nispel, Mark Pellington and Mark Romanek.

and better compression algorithms similarly place sound materials as points in space, or seamlessly meld them into immersive environments. My argument extends Bordwell's to claim it is not just camera and editing, but all parameters – acting, lighting, performance, sound effects, musical materials. Everything becomes heightened, set off, voluble. The films' forms distort as well, from the local to the large-scale. I call this new stylistic configuration 'intensified audiovisual aesthetics'.

It is beyond this essay's scope to ascertain music video's influence in relation to technology, or the ways it worked with other shaping forces.³ Suffice it to say that today many film directors break into features not by graduating from film school with a strong showreel, apprenticing in the industry or writing scripts, but through making music videos. Directors like David Fincher, Spike Jonze and Hype Williams worked in music video for a long time before making the shift.⁴ They acknowledge that music video provided them with unusual training. Fincher calls music videos a kind of 'sandbox' where he could try anything; he never learned traditional filmmaking, nor does he want to. Responding to the constraints of the genre, music video directors often turn to a song's structure to generate the image.

Such untraditional schooling may have helped foster new ways of knowing music, image and sound and, in this context Michel Gondry makes a good case-study as a music-video-turned-film director thanks to his preeminence in his original medium. *The New York Times* has called him 'the most sought after video director in the world' and his work was among the first to be distributed on Palm Pictures' music video compilation DVDs. His training as a drummer and extensive experience in animation seem to have attuned him particularly sensitively to changes in popular music. At the same time, as a filmmaker he brings a particularly powerful sensibility to the cinema. Without diminishing scriptwriter Charlie Kaufman's importance to the film, we can see that Gondry's contribution to *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), for example, goes much deeper than what is typical for Hollywood directors. If my approach here has an auteurist flavour, it is because Gondry played a major role in the mise-en-scene, the sound design, the development of the script, the comportment of the characters, the creation of visual schemes, the control of location and the establishment of rhythmic flow; in addition, the film is suffused with his personal motifs and favourite techniques. This itself reflects the practices of music video. Music video directors wield control over every phase of production: the making of storyboards, the casting of extras and the selection of props, the shooting, the editing, and many processes normally considered purely mechanical in other genres. It should not surprise us that *Eternal Sunshine*'s star, Jim Carrey, calls the director Cecil B. Gondry.

In examining this film in depth, this essay has two sections. In the first I discuss a number of visual details and call attention to their 'worked' quality, paying special attention to the film's varied and densely layered soundtrack, separately and in its close relation to the imagetrack. I will

5 Stanley Cavell, *Cities of Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 109.

6 The centrality of these norms is argued for in Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting* (New York, NY: Harper-Collins, 1997). McKee famously appears as a character in Spike Jonze's *Adaptation* (2002). Charlie Kaufman's mock-autobiographical script shows its screenwriter protagonist reluctantly taking McKee's workshop.

7 *Eternal Sunshine's* 1970s scenes, staged in the kitchen of Joel's childhood, illuminate his desire to possess both his mother and his girlfriend. Mierzwiak, an obstacle to these relationships, erases these memories, making such relationships impossible.

argue that Gondry's engagement with music and other elements of the soundtrack, and his ways of mixing old and new technologies, work to create a form capable of holding many points of view. In the second section I focus on the ways in which Gondry extends traditional and contemporary Hollywood filmmaking processes, deploys sound and image to ground local shifts in colour, exposure, film stock and additional postproduction techniques, and foregrounds process and flow, colour and texture, the use of tableaux and rhythmic effects. *Eternal Sunshine* is structured as a lattice of sound-image connections. Although the film can be understood to take place largely inside one character's head, its multiple points of view are not governed by a single, overarching perspective; often its separate strands do not even meet one another. This latticework allows for surprising connections, however, and thus for a strangely moving cinematic experience. For better or worse, films like *Eternal Sunshine* tell a truth about how we experience people and ordinary life in a late-modern cultural context.

To give a brief synopsis of the film: Joel (Jim Carrey) and Clem (Kate Winslet) have problems that are due in part to their unproductive conversation.⁵ The film unfolds as a series of flashbacks, making the chronology of events uncertain, but by the film's midpoint its plot outlines become clearer: Clem has broken off their relationship and, with the help of a company called Lacuna, had all her memories of Joel erased. Joel, in response, undergoes the same procedure. Lacuna's staff visit Joel's apartment to assist in the memory-erasing process. Joel, unconscious but still able to hear some things in the environment, may be moved by their romantic entanglements. Halfway through the process he relives some memories of Clem and refuses to give her up. When Mary, Lacuna's receptionist, discovers she has undergone the memory-erasing procedure to forget a relationship with Dr Mierzwiak, Lacuna's chief physician, she informs all of the company's patients that they have had the procedure. Joel and Clem meet again in the film's present, presumably spurred by memory traces to return to the site of their first encounter. They decide to begin the relationship again.

Though *Eternal Sunshine* is strongly shaped by music video aesthetics, it also works within a Hollywood context by borrowing some conventional cinematic techniques. At the broadest level, Kaufman's script adheres to Hollywood screenplay form.⁶ The first traditional plot point occurs before the film begins, when Clem erases Joel. Joel's response to Clem, to erase her, constitutes the second turn. A strong midpoint happens when Joel commits to keeping his memories. The fourth takes place when Mary informs clients of Lacuna's practices, and the fifth when Joel and Clem decide to stay together. The film also has strong Oedipal pulls and an unyielding, pressing deadline (erasure by dawn).⁷ But within this clear narrative framework, much is opaque. The film's baffling opening, for example, leaves viewers with little sense of forward motion. *Eternal Sunshine's* first half is based more on process

- 8 The film also presents a regression from recent memories back through adolescent humiliation to childhood; this might imply a clear directionality, but a shot of Joel sucking his thumb comes too early, and low-angle shots of toys, knick-knacks and circus elephants, which suggest a child's point of view, might appear anywhere.
- 9 This close engagement among image, sound and memory feels somehow musical and works like music video. See Carol Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 20–24.
- 10 I am quoting from Les Brill's excellent analysis of John Huston's *Freud* (1962), with which *Eternal Sunshine* has some things in common. Huston's introductory voiceover for *Freud* narrates: 'this is the story of Freud's descent into a region almost as black as hell itself, man's unconscious, and how he let in the light'. Like *Eternal Sunshine*, *Freud* draws upon a large repertoire of visual and aural motifs to suggest interpersonal relationships and personal obsessions. Both films deal closely with the workings of cathexis. I would claim that *Eternal Sunshine's* surface is more laboured than *Freud's*; Brill admires *Freud* for its humanism. Les Brill, *John Huston's Filmmaking* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 175.
- 11 It is difficult to classify these threads or even to group them into thicker strands. A list includes the following: Charles River/Montauk, folksongs, Huckleberry Hound doll and other childhood toys, orange sweatshirt, coloured hair, alcohol, mattress, pillow, posada skeletons, lamps, panties and crotch, partial faces, diary and drawings, files and mail, birds, dog, quotations, airplanes, old technology including videotapes, old tape recording machines and so on, Patrick, out-of-tune upright piano, drums and drumming, chopsticks, plaid blanket/leopardskin blanket and fur, blank,

than teleology: we follow a device that erases one memory after another and the machinations of a brain as it shuffles through material.⁸ As with music video, it is difficult to gauge where we are going; the viewer just has to go with the flow. Much of the film's context supports a looser structure: masturbation, medical procedures, fantasies, memories, dreaming, as well as fluctuating and altered states brought about by drugs and rapidly shifting charged emotions.

Music video imagery, though it can have narrative elements, is often processually structured, which better reflects a song's own movement and keeps our focus on the music. Music videos often centre on a single or a few processes. (Here I define process simply as the act of carrying on or going on, a series of actions, changes or functions bringing about a result.) Such projects can seem arbitrary, as one activity might as well have been picked as another. In addition, a sustained treatment of an activity might come unexpectedly, and its duration may be unusually prolonged or drastically abbreviated, cut short by images of the band performing. The video's main project may be dispersed across a number of the song's sections. When footage of this material reappears, it bears an uncanny sense of return. Sections of *Eternal Sunshine* can be seen to work in precisely this way, especially in the extensive cross-cutting among Stan's and Mary's love affair, Patrick's and Clem's courtship, and Joel's memories. (This is partly because we are unsure where we are picking up or leaving off.) Each serial representation of memories possesses a new visual-aural scheme and a particular way of rendering the experience of memory.⁹ Upon reflection we can see that *Eternal Sunshine* 'follows the traditional romantic model, with the usual descent into the underworld in pursuit of a great prize followed by reascents – in this film, psychological rebirths or epiphanies'.¹⁰ But the viewer is often unaware of or confused by this quest, in no small part because Joel is too passive and depressed to stand as a volitional character.

At the local level the film has a striking kinship with music video. Gondry's music videos demonstrate that he can handle many visual and aural motifs; these individual motifs together create threads that subsequently work in counterpoint. The best example from Gondry's video work might be Daft Punk's 'Around the World', in which each of several character-types – mummies, women in bathing suits, old-school hip-hop figures with double heads, spacemen – become linked to a particular musical line. As with many of his videos, *Eternal Sunshine* organizes its material in this way: a motif is introduced and extended by repetitions and other processes, such as looping. These threads work differently than do motifs in most films. A typical narrative film might feature between five and seven motifs (a music video likewise). *Eternal Sunshine*, deploying music video's techniques on a feature film's scale, has over thirty.¹¹ Each one of these motifs, as it reappears, moves from being imperceptible to occupying the foreground and back, crosses into

spot and birthmark, water and snow, American flags, heart, boxes with red ribbon or red wrapping paper, couples, butterflies, flowers and other plant life, figurines, white orbs, houses, fences, expanded spaces, movie theatres and television screens.

12 A second motivic collection is tied to pre-computerized literacy. *Eternal Sunshine* makes visual references to papers and filing containers (knapsacks, folders, envelopes, and so on). A television shows a shot of Grandpa from *The Munsters* passing his hand over a flying book. Stan later says: 'It was here in the paper logs'. We hear rustling papers at three disparate points in the film, and nothing in the image relates to these sounds.

13 David Martin-Jones argues that the appearance of the American flag underscores the film's thematic concern with the importance of taking responsibility for memories and acknowledging mistakes – a progressive post-9/11 turn. A flag turned backwards is placed over the doorway as Mierzwiak runs out of the apartment after his wife. American flags decorate Clem's neighbours' yards. David Martin-Jones, *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity: Narrative Time in National Contexts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

other threads and makes surprising connections. Meaning accrues and gets released unpredictably. Here are six examples:

1. Forty-two examples of blurred, composite and ambiguous faces appear dispersed across the film. These images pop up unexpectedly, suggesting that Joel's cathexis to Clem is arbitrary. The compromised integrity of the human face – within the genre of romantic film – begins to undermine the naturalness or rightness of heterosexual coupling.
2. An aeroplane thread suggests childhood and memory, work and leisure, loss of the world and death. Here, an early image of a hanging ornament with birds (a type of bi-plane) may link to the crashed aeroplane near the film's end. Clothing – baby Joel's aeroplane-patterned pajamas and Clem's black lace, fiery Barnes & Noble dress (foreshadowed by a framed photo of a plane in descent with a red-tinged postcard tucked into a corner at the couple's friends Carey's and Rob's house) – help to suggest the couple are tied to the plane that will go down. Joel watches this plane's flight at a picnic and sees it wrecked through a rear car window. A variety of musics against the plane's appearance further load the image's semiosis.
3. The film's several montage sections reassert many threads quickly. Several brief references become subliminal here: images of alcohol appear twenty-three times. During Joel's second visit to Mierzwiak's office, a Tsingtao bottle appears for only two frames. Montage sections also function as switch points whereby material within threads can cross media, from text to image to music. We frequently see tape recorders and other old recording devices (as well as recorded media such as VHS tapes and audiocassettes). In one montage sequence we suddenly hear the lone words 'tape recorder'.¹² Conversely, crossing from sound to image, we hear an out-of-tune piano before we finally notice upright pianos in the film's middle and closing montage.
4. Some of the visual material is delicately worked, while other imagery is handled more broadly, to create cycles of recurring material. American flags appear several times: once with the elephants.¹³ Joel mentions that Clem creates the illusion that 'she can take you to another galaxy'. A poster near Joel's bed depicts a meteor piercing the earth's atmosphere, about to jam into a man's head. Joel wears a galaxy sweater when he and Clem witness the elephant parade. Panties, on the other hand, are worked so thoroughly that they become material. (I like the unattractive, out-of-focus pair hanging behind Patrick and Clem before they visit the frozen Charles River.)
5. The skeleton motif comes in various guises: Joel's sketches of Clem (as Greek myth and childhood story); a life-size stuffed doll wrapped around a smaller Groucho Marx figure; red-outs during Joel's memory-erasure; a miniature skull on a clock, which becomes a doppelganger for Clem; a potato doll. On the lighter side, the

15 of the 42 images that comprise the string of faces.



6 of the 14 images that make up the string of aeroplanes.



14 Here Joel crosses back from the dream of his mother's kitchen into a waking state in his living room: after his baby self gets sucked down the drain while being bathed in the kitchen sink, he reemerges, gasping for breath, as the Lacuna group hovers over him. Night scenes were shot in the studio, so the spot on the ceiling must have been deliberately painted there.

15 The spots and blanks feel Hitchcockian. See William Rothman, *Hitchcock: the Murderous Gaze* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 260.

skeletons resemble Mexican posada figures, which might seem life-affirming but they lead also to faux suicides (note the suffocations and black and red lines around Joel's and Clem's necks). Suffocation scenes are sometimes staged with superimposed lamps: lamps and white-outs become linked to the skeleton motif.

6. The spot motif, most commonly seen on Joel's temple, one time as a pox on his face, another as patterning on curtains, carries over into dialogue when Mary, off-frame, screams 'It's a birthmark'. An almost imperceptible detail follows: a spot painted on the ceiling.¹⁴ Perhaps here is a secret in the film. Does the film's hovering between spots and blanks suggest an oscillation between guilt and nothingness?¹⁵ Or perhaps this is just a decoy, pure decoration – we do not know. Even

more confounding, we have black spots throughout the film, then the viewer may notice a surfeit of carefully placed red spots as well. What do these marks mean? Perhaps these *red* (as opposed to black) spots form a trail for the viewer to hold on to as the film progresses. Visual motifs in *Eternal Sunshine* remain small and malleable, as are the swatches of music and bits of text we tend to remember. Gondry seems to be moved by the ideal of reducing dialogue, music, sound and image to their smallest possible units, which can then interchange with one another – an ideal of erasing the differences between media.

It is hard to ascertain fully which kinds of work these motifs accomplish. Each creates part of a set and, as it comes forward and recedes, helps form a thread crossing the film. These threads overlap and interpenetrate, suggesting contagion, something that is common in music video.¹⁶ For example, the bi-plane ornament hanging in Joel's bedroom window contains two glass birds. It could therefore be said to work as an image of the couple as well as a link in the descending plane thread. Joel's friend Carl puts a birdcage together with a hammer. As a young boy Joel mutilates a dead bird with a hammer (while another bird cries before flying away). The music in the opening scene (with the bi-plane ornament) suggests the workaday, with its sluggish, out-of-tune irregularity (and odd structure of five-measure phrases); the childhood scene's music, on the other hand, is highly nostalgic, scored for strings with a rinky-dink piano reiterating a single 'lost' pitch in the high register. Is there a connection here between labour, love, loneliness, childhood and the loss of the chance for Joel and Clem to have a family?

Many motifs seem archetypally evocative, like faces, skeletons and lamps. But many are also placed in unusual structures and are not typical motifs to begin with: often they seem both highly emotionally charged and personal to Gondry. The open form and disrupted, ambiguous imagery of the film creates a space for Gondry to import imagery he has developed in music video: a group of boys, one of whom wears a colander on his head, a person in a dentist's chair on a busy street, or a couple in a bed on the beach in falling snow. These images belong to music video's high emotional intensity. Because music is rich in affect, music video imagery tends to have a moment-by-moment semiotic wallop unparalleled in film. This imagery, in combination with its speed and flow, creates a sense of compression and disappearance. *Eternal Sunshine's* repetitive focus on lost items, fetish objects and fragments – stolen panties and Bartlett's quotations, Clem's frequent rejoinder 'remember me' – is an attempt to stop the flow, to grasp something permanent in a moving form.

A kind of flow reminiscent of popular music is achieved in the film through both musical and visual devices. Some musical cues continue across several scenes, like Joel's waking up during his train ride to Montauk; glissandos also rise and fall and musical cues modulate rapidly up or down. Visually, moving imagery – cars, dollies and characters'

17 Richard Middleton has argued that one of the defining features of popular music is its high degree of repetition – rhythms, timbres, iconic materials, and sectional divisions repeat endlessly and build to a state of *jouissance*. Richard Middleton, 'Over and over: notes towards a politics of repetition'. URL: <http://www2.hu-berlin.de/fpm/texte/middle.htm> [accessed 4 July 2008].

well drawn gestures – and abrupt cutting all keep things progressing. Tour-de-force set pieces highlighting movement include Joel's drive, his walk to his living room, the swallowing of his medicine and rolling on a gurney; a bad memory in which the camera spins around the room as Mierzwiak explains 'I'm in you'; the film's last montage sequence, experienced from the back seat of a moving car. Even dialogue and concrete sound prompt us forward. Words pass rapidly among sources, from voices Joel hears in his head, to those spoken in the live environment and those emitted from the telephone. Room-tone shifts in pitch and timbre during a scene's course, an event which rarely occurs in real life but contributes to flow.

Repetition both structures the film and relates to Gondry's stylistic preoccupations. With a mathematical mind as well as a childlike playfulness, Gondry loves circular forms. We can see this in his video for the Chemical Brothers' 'Star Guitar', in which the terrain seen out of a train window begins to loop and multiply. Pop songs and videos generally use repetitions and loops more extensively than do narrative films,¹⁷ but in Gondry's pieces, each time we return to the same, it feels like a new turn. *Eternal Sunshine* presents repetitions and variations reinforced by multiples and loops within scenes. Three Joels appear simultaneously during Wozniak's first mapping of Joel's memories, for example; the sound of a record scratching, which reappears throughout the film, further cues us that we are stuck in repeat. Several musical motifs reiterate insistently. A four-note motif (high-low-high-low) is phrased with a breath in the middle, suggesting a loop within a loop and repetitive labour. A five-note, sometimes six-note pizzicato figure runs across the film; its promiscuity suggests obsessive repetition. In this film it is mostly the music that tells us that we are cycling.

The film resembles music video at higher structural levels. It divides into segments that work like inset music videos, each organized by unique visual and aural principles. The film's opening, in which Joel takes the train to Montauk and returns with Clem, is held together by cartoon music and reverberant ghostly environmental sounds; the colour scheme emphasizes milky blues and whites. The title sequence, with lurid peacock tones as virulent as those in *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976), is accompanied by indie/alternative and orchestral night music. A drive back from the train station matches more flatly-tinted dark imagery and nearly inaudible snatches of saccharine pop tunes. Rather than narrative teleology coming to the fore, the disjunctiveness of these sections is highlighted through formal features based on similarity and difference.

In this way, *Eternal Sunshine*'s segmentation departs from Hollywood norms as several set pieces take on the same weight as plot points. Joel passes through the eye/drain, is birthed through a tiger blanket (while grasping for a memory), nearly suffocates in Clem's hands, and faces off against a Medusan image of Clem during Mierzwiak's first memory-mapping. Four times the soundtrack approaches closure as it moves from the tonic in its first inversion to its more stable root position. Here Joel

swallows Mierzwiak's memory-erasing pills, runs away from Clem at the Raskin's summer home, suffers Mierzwiak's machine's last memory deletion, and, at the film's end, nearly loses Clem as she walks out the door.

Several other processes help suppress narrative and create a sense of musicality. Clem's changing hair colour suggests a cycle like the seasons. Joel becomes both younger and older as the film unfolds. (The process of becoming more youthful includes Clem's encouraging 'Slidy Slidy', a tangerine-centric hide-and-seek game of 'Duck ruck ruck', and roughhousing on the bed.) In *Eternal Sunshine*, becoming younger and ageing are retrograde processes. In addition, several audiovisual parameters, such as movement in the frame, camerawork and sound effects, pull large parts of the film towards moments of culmination and deceleration: here images and sound gradually accrue into a visual and aural 'white-out' before liquidating into a corresponding aural diminuendo and a fade to black. On the supplementary DVD material, Gondry's focus stays with topics like light and snow: he is interested in changes of weather. Patterns like this play against the film's plot-points, adding a new layer of information and complicating *Eternal Sunshine*'s structure.

I have described a formal structure based on cycles and nested patterns (plot points, moments of acceleration and deceleration, inset music video sections, loops, repetitions, strings of motifs) and little narrative drive. Let me describe one way that the soundtrack seizes the foreground. A cluster of five sounds – a keyboard tremolo, a midrange beep, a record scratch, a low-pitched clarinet motif, an electronic noise that sounds like crumbling – help to cue us that a memory has crystallized, started to degrade and then become erased. But the order of these sounds is often reversed or interchanged with other diegetic sounds like a doorbell ringing or the output of an inkjet printer. When we are within a memory, much of its meaning remains ambiguous, including its beginning and end, and its relation to other memories. The most definitive markers for how to phrase visual material seems lodged in the soundtrack, but this information demands exegesis. Patterns of diegetic material – fax machines, phone lines, the banging of a hammer – also group together like the memory-erasure cluster, making all sound worthy of focused attention.

Music video's semiotically indeterminate images can draw listeners' attention to an audio track that's open to interpretation. In *Eternal Sunshine* several kinds of visual distortion – off-balance framing, periodically out of focus, hand-held, speeded up, slowed down or out-of-synch camerawork, strangely colour-processed and markedly over- and under-exposed footage – work to lend an ambiguity to shots and the edits between them. Take, for example, colour-processing and exposure: *Eternal Sunshine*'s colour shifts from one shot to the next as well as across shots. Among the most highly prized technicians in the music video industry, colour timers are known to tweak each shot individually, so that shots can be made to reflect musical changes; they will also often play the music alongside the image to more finely calibrate the colour.

Changing colours draw attention to texture, surface and materiality. Rapid shifts also require that the viewer resituate herself: visual gaps encourage viewers to find meaning where they can and one source close at hand is the soundtrack. With regard to exposure, both blacks and whites in *Eternal Sunshine* are pushed until they lose their detail, a phenomenological impossibility except perhaps in the moment when the human eye's iris expands or contracts and fails to register a scene. Out-of-focus, unbalanced images, speeded-up and slowed-down footage, expressionistic colour-timing and digital intermediary, as well as jump cuts, possess a similar ambiguity that sound can help the viewer resolve. Images, music and sounds hold together through shape, movement, colour, texture and expressivity.

Before discussing the soundtrack, let me comment on the film's acting, which helps mediate the film's prismatic effects. In *Eternal Sunshine*, figures often move in freer ways – seemingly less constrained by the limits of gravity and physics – than do actors in classic Hollywood. (One might equate these performers with restless zoo animals: leopards pacing or monkeys ricocheting off trees.) Music video directors are accustomed to working with dancers and performers who speak through their bodies, who possess a hypermobility. Gondry mines what James Naremore calls the visceral side of acting, where skin flushes, tears swell, sweat pours and breathing becomes laboured.¹⁸ Bodily processes, too, are exploited for their musicality, as both sound and gesture. It is not insignificant that Gondry chose a physical comedian as his lead actor, and I have two theories that might explain this. First, music video is short, lacks dialogue and must showcase the singer, underscore the lyrics and highlight musical material. In a way it returns us to the silent era, particularly to a form of typeage used by filmmakers such as Eisenstein. Music video directors have to find shots that possess signs of human emotion powerful enough for the images to project over the music; but the performers, while usually polished and self-assured, are not actorly. Second, music videos do not present classical performances because they lack cause/effect, action/reaction relationships, except in the most fanciful ways. My interviews with music video directors suggest they have a fascination with, and desire for control over, cinematic elements that are unavailable in music video.

Against the showy star performances, we also have other representations: Clem as a stalker, an ominous and mysterious figure depicted as a background, dying and dead body, a doll, an embossed surface on a coffee cup, photographs. This range of depiction – from star performer, background figure, to person rendered as inanimate object – is a music video conceit, useful for the ways in which it reveals pop music's structure.¹⁹

Sound holds the film's secrets. An early cue is when Stan, beginning a memory map of Joel's brain, slams the first personal item onto the steel tray. A plastic snowglobe (a quote from *Citizen Kane* – the city within is Boston) charms, but it is the closely-miked sound bouquet of Clem's

18 James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 64–5.

19 Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video*, pp. 54–73. Mannequin figures appear frequently in music video because they can mediate between silence and becoming. Videos establish a continuum from stillness to flux: inanimate decor connects to the quiet out of which the song begins; still figures match the slowest rhythmic stratum; moderate physical movements such as knee-bends, heads turning to one side, or steps forward match midtempo articulations; frenetic visual elements such as the showy, fluttery gestures of the star, the rapid movement of small turning objects and shifting patterns of light speak to faster rhythmic strata. Gondry, as co-scriptwriter, may have included these depictions because they have become central to his lexicon.

laughter, whoopee-cushion squeaks and a music-box that floods the viewer. Clem's orange sweatshirt draws Joel to her, but it is her singing that takes him back to childhood: 'oh, my darlin', sings Clementine, then Joel sings this as he tries to comfort himself as a toddler, and his mother sings it to him as she bathes him in the sink. The film is depicted as a quest, and it is the music that cues us to its turns. Downward glissandi lead us into the first memory of Clem leaving as Joel chases her past shop windows. 'Michael, row your boat ashore' triggers Joel's access to childhood. Glissandi also take us to the first moments of toddlerhood. In a subtle intertextual reference, the cue that accompanies Joel while he swallows his memory-erasing medication is the same as for the production company logo that appears in the title credits ('FOCUS', the 'O' out of focus, no less). Even before Joel consumes the pill, we are cued to forget and remember.

The preeminence of the soundtrack may be partly due to Gondry's background as a musician: a semi-professional drummer, he marks beats and creates graphic scores reminiscent of 1960s experimental music. Devices to move the soundtrack into the foreground include a kind of frequent, frank play with the roles of diegesis and between diegetic and nondiegetic sources. The music stops and starts, unprovoked, when Joel and Clem reunite on the train. Often the music unexpectedly shifts genres, such as during the opening credits, when a tape tossed from a car window hits the pavement. This 'music video moment' suggests that recorded music (represented diegetically as a cassette) possesses a mysterious authority. Sounds are also foregrounded by being untethered or pushed away from their sources. Near the opening of the film, Joel stands alone before a beachfront property and a distant voice that resembles Clem's calls 'David'. We learn much later that the empty house's owners are named David and Ruth Laskin, but this does not explain why we should hear Clem say David's name. A record scratch often sounds in the film, but we never quite know quite why. Yes, it seems to mark a wiped memory, but why has that sound been chosen to do so and why does it appear in so many guises? These isolated, sphinx-like elements seem to possess a secret about the film: if we could unlock their mystery, we might understand the story.

The collages of environmental sounds are so beautifully built up that they become musical. Partly these sounds call attention to themselves by being wrong for their spaces; partly an isolated sound or two, brought to the fore, become so interesting that they function as an environment's melody or its musical hook.²⁰ In the Barnes & Noble store, the voices belong more to an airport than a bookshop, and the lights going off sound like timpani. Breathing, sixty-cycle hum, cymbals and a 'whoosh' accompany Joel's passing-out under medication. The diner where Clem and Joel first meet is accompanied by crickets chirping (though crickets would not whirl in a diner at midday) and the coffee machine sounds like a wild bird. Its registral spread and melodic content can be heard as setting up some of the film's key musical themes: the long glissandi and a

²⁰ See Charles Kronengold, 'Accidents, hooks and theory', *Popular Music*, vol. 24, no. 3 (2005), pp. 385–6. Music videos develop a variety of means to underscore a song's hooks.

high-pitched, quickly articulated melodic line that sounds like speeded-up audiotape, sometimes performed on instruments, sometimes electronically.

Bursts of cacophony – crashing, bumping into things, dropping objects, general mayhem – also contribute to the sound score. These noises not only advance the film’s themes of lack of control and loss of memory, but also work to create a rich sonic texture. As a drummer, Gondry might have a strong relation to sonic materiality. Many moments in the soundtrack suggest that people and things are linked at a sub-surface level: characters silently drum; the sounds appear elsewhere.

Much of *Eternal Sunshine*’s dialogue is close-miked voiceover, which draws attention to the soundtrack. More than in most films, close-miking here magnifies whispers, murmurs, breathing, sighs, and intimate features of a voice’s grain. Traditionally in Hollywood film, camera placement can vary tremendously while mic placement does not, so that audio levels stay consistent. Once we attend to changing audio levels, we are taken out of the film’s diegesis. *Eternal Sunshine* constantly plays with miking, moving it nearer or farther. Words will pop out of the sound texture or move towards inaudibility, rising and falling rapidly. Voices are heavily processed and distorted. We hear an unusually volatile mix of live dialogue, recorded at the filming, and looped dialogue, recorded later in the sound studio. These are often spliced together within the same sentence. Music, image and dialogue become equally musical.

The film’s dialogue consistently emphasizes sing-songy, hooky effects like assonance or rhyme.²¹ ‘ClemenTEEN, the tangeREEN.’ ‘Two blue ruins.’ ‘Duck, ruck, ruck.’ Phrases are often said twice, thus encouraging variation. Repetition addresses problems of memory; it helps to ground the flow of information when material comes too fast; but even more importantly, as in a pop song, when words are uttered twice, their materiality – their pitch and timbre – comes forward. ‘Potions, potions I said.’ ‘I want to have a baby. I want to have a baby.’ ‘What should we do? What should we do?’ ‘Half-baked, no half-baked.’ ‘Slidy slidy slidy.’ ‘Female, female?’ ‘I didn’t make the plane crash. I didn’t make the plane crash.’ Repeated words are also sung, and by more than one speaker, which makes no real-world sense. Both Clem and Mierzwiak call out ‘Pa-a-a-trick, ba-a-a-a-by boy.’ The dialogue crosses over into and describes the music. When Joel says, ‘Osidius, swoop and cross. Osidius, swoop and cross.’ he’s performing a rhythm of short short short, long which is a primary musical motive of the film. Patrick’s singing in the van – ‘mane-she-sherr’ (Stan tells him to shut up) – takes us back to the Lata Mangeshkar song we hear in Clem’s apartment. Again, this is nonsensical as Patrick was not there. The film contains much singing and some piano playing. Stan and Patrick’s line ‘Showtime at the Apollo,’ suggests in a different way that this film is a musical event.

As with environmental sounds and dialogue, the scored music often vies for attention and diverges from traditional film practices. Joel’s and

21 Quentin Tarantino often employs these techniques.

22 In the soundtrack here, claves recall the old technique of using coconut shells to make the sound of horses' hooves. Why would we hear horses' hooves during Clem and Joel's courtship on a train? Music videos often play with diegetic sound-sources that differ from the sounds of the song. In the foreground, we might see a Slurpee machine churning away, while the song has a 'squish squish' that exists at a distance from its real-world counterpart, as in the Smashing Pumpkins' '1979'.

23 Joel fingers a glass with tiny daisies and Clem wears the same miniature flowers on her shirt. This doubling suggests some sort of connection. In this case the image reinforces the musical point.

24 Michel Chion, *Audiavision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbmann (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 90–91.

Clem's first encounter, on a train, differs so much from conventional narrative approaches that the viewer may have trouble engaging with the story. In a way this musical cue constitutes traditional dramatic scoring, using orchestral instruments like clarinet and bassoon, but it continually stops and starts. Moreover this music contends with diegetic sounds: the clarinet converses with the train's squeaky wheels and Clem sniffing her nasal decongestant, while the bassoon answers Joel's chuckles. This editorializing draws even greater attention towards the soundtrack.²²

While it is strange for an intimate train sequence to receive such orchestral scoring, other sequences are scored with an opposite aesthetic. In scenes with Patrick we often hear cheesy synthesizer sounds panned artificially hard, so that string sounds are on one side, woodwind sounds on the other. The film also often interweaves *diegetic sound* overscored with *nondiegetic music*, as when the young Joel bangs out a four/four on a dead bird and an out-of-tune piano and strings fill in the accompaniment, thus making the boundary between music and sound more fluid. Gondry seems to want his materials to run free and intermingle.

Eternal Sunshine draws on the history of film-scoring techniques. Leitmotifs describe character: when Clem sleeps in Joel's car after their romantic encounter on the Charles River, a graceful flute-line accompanies her. Similarly, when Joel and Clem meet in her apartment, a recording of Hindi film music switches between male and female vocalists, suggesting star-crossed lovers.²³ We hear aural closeups, as Michel Chion might describe them, such as the chugging of a fax machine.²⁴ *Eternal Sunshine*'s score contains a refrain: workaday music and schoolchildren's voices frame the film's beginning and end; children's voices also prep for the middle – Joel's return to childhood. The film's postmodern deployment of modernist, popular and ethnic music, orchestral and electronic sources, sound collages and unusual arrangements gives the score a contemporary feel.

The film's musical score *is* remarkably heterogeneous: Bollywood, New Orleans jazz, Stockhausen, Penderecki, Hindemith, expressionism, Bernard Herrmann, Tom Waits, punk, alternative and closer-to-mainstream pop, vaudeville, early American folk tunes, opera, Warner Brothers cartoon music, carousel or circus music, night music, classical divertimenti, Strauss, barroom tunes, Henry Mancini and Martin Denny and children's songs are all represented, music that, once popular, has now receded from the musical lexicon. This use of heirloom music underscores what is lost in the process of forgetting. Unexplored ways of feeling and knowing are locked into these musical styles. The film's composer, Jon Brion, also makes some clever instrumental arrangements – a string quartet, mellotron, a plunky guitar and record skips, for instance, make up one of the film's cues. What these unusual sounds communicate in their new contexts calls for decryption. It is almost as if, to underscore the film's themes, the soundtrack becomes its own dislocated memory. The image correspondingly deforms in response to

the music. Regarding a shot of Clem and Joel on the frozen Charles River, for example, Gondry says that a puzzling stream of lights in the background was only added once he'd heard the cue Brion had composed for the scene, and that he added it with the specific idea of enriching the music.

A close mapping of the film's musical structure would prove daunting: many of the musical cues are short and tonally undefined; and the record scratches, animal calls, sixty-cycle hum, computer clicks, and so on have pitch and rhythmic content. The vast assortment of musical styles interspersed with concrete sounds slow the narrative flow. Nevertheless, we can discern one or two broad themes that work dialectically.

Much of the music, such as modernist classical, Indian film music or eighteenth-century divertimenti, might be foreign to Hollywood audiences. The most intimate scenes in the movie – elephants on parade, a night drive with montaged images replaying out the back window, Clem and Joel wrestling in the snow – are accompanied by stripped-down, delicately arranged folk music that is both diatonic and acoustic, such as an out-of-tune piano, strummed guitar or a small string ensemble. It seems that the more modernist and ethnic styles form an outside, while the delicate, simple and folksy music forms the characters' private emotional core. This more intimate music is paired with material associated with memory, heterosexuality and family. But, even though these more intimate musical cues threaten to become the score's dominant thread, they are partly countered by the prominence of the drumming motif, which obtains a greater degree of continuity and is worked through in a concerted way.

Joel frequently drums his fingers – a condition endemic among drummers. As a little boy he also drums while gazing out the window into the rain. His friend Carl hammers away on a birdhouse while his girlfriend exclaims, 'Carl, give it a rest!' Later, kids smash a dead bird with a hammer. Clem's apartment radiator continually clicks, adding a new rhythmic stratum to Mangeshkar's song. Bongos are conspicuously placed on a counter in Joel's apartment. The cue accompanying the kitchen scene of Joel's childhood contains a fast, pizzicato rhythmic figure in addition to traces of 1970s pop/muzak, and the sound for the picnic scene of Joel's first contact with Clem consists solely of bongos against the drone of the red aeroplane. The drumming in this scene – a key one in Joel and Clem's relationship – seems to be the culmination of the previous drumming allusions and exemplifies drumming's special role in the film. This is not just down to known facts about the director's background, but also because these musical swatches are long while the visual motifs are short. The film emphasizes natural sounds and the accidental sounds of ageing technology, and presents drumming as second nature: these sources are understood as emotionally and conceptually more important than gestures that bear the signs of intention.

- ²⁵ *Eternal Sunshine* borrows heavily from Hitchcock, who created novel narrative forms in films such as *Psycho* and *Vertigo*. Clem's flowery red and black dress that she wears in the Barnes & Noble references Eve's dress in *North by Northwest*'s Chicago hotel room. Both women have almost killed their lovers: here, the dresses suggest death, sexuality and rebirth. Like Eve's mothering of Thornhill, Clem mothers Joel.
- ²⁶ See Carole Lyn Piechota, 'Once more and innumerable times more: Nietzsche's eternal return in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, *Film and Philosophy*, no. 11 (2007), pp. 173–82.
- ²⁷ The image resembles De Chirico in its empty, still and eerie tone. The film contains other high-art allusions such as the Vermeer-like drawing of a woman in an open book on Joel's table. One thinks of the image of a seamstress on a book's open page in *Un Chien Andalou*. (The sketched woman links to the many white figurines in Joel's bedroom, as well as white orbs, some of which are deformed.) Gondry's degree of control over visual material borders on obsessive: note the anthropomorphized lamp that moves when Stan says Joel has gone off the map. The emblematic red car seen out of Joel's window (which helps build connections to the film's final montage sequence) is substituted by a tree in the film's closing scene. Perhaps the film's visually prismatic effects are not overwhelming because we are watching the workings of the unconscious, which as Freud argues is mechanical and built upon signifiers, not morals or themes.
- ²⁸ See Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video*, p. 10.
- ²⁹ E. Ann Kaplan first noticed this phenomenon in her analysis of Madonna's 'Papa Don't Preach'. Even with only one performer, the video showcases two Madonnas – Madonna 1 and Madonna 2. E. Ann Kaplan, *Rocking Around the Clock: MTV Postmodernism and Consumer Culture* (New York, NY: Methuen, 1987), p. 130.
- ³⁰ See Kobena Mercer, 'Monster

What I have described is an extreme fragmentation of the music and image, but *Eternal Sunshine* succeeds in its Hollywood context by drawing on a number of key cultural texts, most prominently the plot of *Vertigo*. As with Hitchcock's 1958 film, we start by attempting to resolve the secret of an unknown woman, and through that pursuit we discover facets of her persona. The betrayal, the stalking in strange locations, the shifting hair colour, the dumbing-down of the woman, the grave, the desire for a fully-lived moment with the beloved – 'I have you now', 'I am exactly where I want to be' – the sense of loss, all recall *Vertigo*. And like Hitchcock's Scottie, Joel is reduced to a childlike catatonic state.²⁵ Much of the footage in *Eternal Sunshine* might be seen as an expansion of Scottie's dream, in which we move through the detritus of Joel's brain.

When Clem first appears on the train, she looks like something out of Dr Seuss or *Alice in Wonderland*, with wristwarmers, floppy round handbag and the goings in and out of rabbit hutch-like doorways). This imagery helps to take Joel back to childhood.

The film also bears traces of Greek myth: the film's labyrinthine structure, with its compound spaces and loops, harks back to the story of the Minotaur (a truck might stand in for the Minotaur); Clem, as a skeleton in the boat, recalls *The Owl and the Pussycat*, but also Charon, the ferryman who takes us to Hades; changing hair colour and disappearances and reappearances allude to Persephone; Joel's following her and forgetting his past recalls the myth of Orpheus; the couple discusses the constellations of Orion and the Pleiades.²⁶

Eternal Sunshine presents familiar themes, imagery and narrative devices in the context of new media. The first noticeably post-produced effect – a car falling through the sky to crash in a vacant lot – is preceded by a subtle detail: a shot through Lacuna's van revealing the street, canted sideways. As Joel chases Clem past shop windows, space becomes strange and prismatic. Superimposed lamps and signs disappear and reappear. The streets perpendicular to this one are exact mirror images of each other. It is a De Chirico effect,²⁷ but it is also a direct description of contemporary filmmaking practices – a director and editor at the Avid's viewer and browser windows watching images flipped on their X-axis, while they fantasize about phantom memory sounds and images whipping by.

As in much music video, *Eternal Sunshine*'s constellation of perspectives remains unresolved.²⁸ In music videos, visual motifs can attach themselves to different musical materials – a bass line, a rhythmic motive, an odd timbral effect – and not annihilate or even influence one another. They can be truly multiperspectival, simultaneously holding conflicting and contradictory evidence.²⁹ Music videos can also present things in part, as a type of music-image cryptogram or koan; it is up to the viewer to piece these together.³⁰

As in a music video, many things are rendered with loving detail in *Eternal Sunshine*, such as props, colours and locations, yet we do not know what Joel's job is, who Joel's father is, or anything about Clem's

parents. The film feels like a Cavellian remarriage comedy, yet many of the indices that work to define this genre – the status of the woman's parents, productive conversations and the move to a green world – are lacking. It also possesses traits of melodrama, most particularly through over-close familial relations and constricted spaces. We cannot get much of a handle on Clem, whether she is real or colored by Joel's desires, whether she is a rescuing angel or a cuckolding bitch. Might Joel suffer from a mild case of mental illness? His sketches and moods certainly suggest so. The status of the key struggle between the couple – whether Clem practices infidelity or not – is unresolved. Is Clem an alcoholic? What is the relationship between key sites, such as Joel's bed, the Charles River and the beach at Montauk? Does Joel try to get back to Clem because he loves her, to resolve his Oedipal desires for his mother, or because another male, Patrick, is moving in on his turf? When are we in a dream or in a real memory? How does the 'real' Clem know to revisit Montauk once Joel and Clem have had their memories erased?

I have claimed that *Eternal Sunshine* has an atypical form. While a classic Hollywood film might possess three or four primary themes, *Eternal Sunshine* has ten: 1. work; 2. time; 3. faces and cathexis; 4. childhood; 5. Clem's constructed persona; 6. the integrity of Clem and Joel as a couple; 7. synoptic connections among people, epitomized by imagery of vortices; 8. the boundaries between culture, nature and the other; 9. the similarities among mind, machines and music; 10. memory and knowledge. Rather than a narrative, these strands function as if they were woven into a music video: material residing within each theme exists apart from material in other themes. When crossing among materials occurs, the effects can be subtle, working on principles of shared influence or contagion. No single theme supersedes or annihilates another. I will briefly describe each of them below.

1. *Eternal Sunshine* is a Hollywood creation insofar as it posits that our life's solutions can be most readily found through successful heterosexuality. While the film does not commit to a socially progressive agenda, it presents a harsh portrait of labour. The psychological stress and tedium of low-wage work wears on Clem: she reports she is a 'book slave'; her job at Barnes & Noble leaves her 'pretty tired, pretty bored'. She faces her customers vacantly and vents frustration with non-functioning office equipment. Her lack of centre comes through when she claims (we never learn quite how seriously), that she 'applies her personality as a paste' and is 'anxious about not filling every moment'. If Clem's solution to alienation is freneticism, Joel's is passivity. His work is so undefining it does not even warrant a description in the film, and, as he says of his life, it's 'a blank' (two years of missing diary entries do not faze him). Lacuna's 'skilled technicians' Stan and Patrick (whom Gondry and Kaufman liken to incompetent Kinko's workers) remain disengaged, their hostility towards clients showing when Stan suggests 'let's not roach

31 Mary's embarrassment when trying to explain to Mierzwik that 'I think it's important for my job to understand the work that we do, well not that I do, but the work by the people where I work. The work of my colleagues,' reveals a moment of odd entanglement between work and social relations.

32 The film does offer two or three minutes of respite within its 142-minute length, but it is only because these scenes are suffused with a sense of loss that they work effectively: Mary's reading of the quotation from Pope and her vision of elephants; Joel's weeping after being sucked through a time warp and leaving behind his mother and Clem; Joel's memory of Clem, shown as a montage of images of the couple seen out of a car's back window as it is driven into the night.

33 The film presents a relatively unexamined depiction of for-profit science in the service of cosmetic surgery for the brain. Lacuna's services do have some grounding in current medical practice: medication is now available for trauma victims that, if taken shortly after the incident, will soften the intensity of imprinted memories. New treatments for drug addiction may soon include medication with VR enactments of drug consumption. The patient's emotional responses to these scenarios will become accentuated. Memory erasure seems close at hand.

34 Some of the films' representations surely invite criticism. Hard-hitting elements in the original scripts have been downplayed. Both Joel and Clem were originally depicted as depressive, with one on Prozac and the other on Zoloft. In one of the later rewrites, Mary has an abortion from a pregnancy with Mierzwik, thus creating a stronger need to forget and a greater sense that her decision to undergo the procedure might constitute a crime of forgetting. Clem is very literate in the earlier scripts. She and Joel talk about books. In the film's closing, she's suddenly made dumb — a magazine-reading rather than a

the guy' before they raid the drinks cabinet. Stan seems a particularly exploited wage-slave: although he pulls days and all-nighters he still does not seem to be earning a decent income. Small-scale sabotage is *Eternal Sunshine's* low-paid workers' one respite: necking behind the computer at Barnes & Noble, partying while your client lies unconscious in bed, stealing a client's panties, quirky uses of leisure time (like making potato dolls, night picnics on ice), and breaking into a rich couple's beachfront property. It is clear these minor acts of resistance come up against rigorously enforced boundaries: Joel claims to have contracted food poisoning to skip a day of work, and Stan fabricates an illness for Patrick; one exuberant outburst of 'Yay!' elicits a dressing-down from the boss. But against this bleak depiction of work, questions of time and interpersonal relations are rarely addressed.³¹

2. Perhaps *Eternal Sunshine's* true theme, and its sense of sadness, derives from the fact that its characters cannot experience time positively. (The film could be said to exhibit the problem of a promise of a pleasure deferred, as each scene moves graspingly onto the next.) Joel's neighbour underscores the problem when he counsels Joel not to 'wind up at Mickey D's. McRomance'. Time spent poorly gets passed on to viewers: when Joel takes Clem's hand and says, 'I feel I'm exactly where I want to be', she's immediately snatched away.³²
3. The film's largely apolitical but still critical reading of contemporary society runs alongside another thread.³³ The series of blurred, hybrid or ambiguous faces suggests our object choices are arbitrary. We do not love a person, but rather cathect onto some aspect or feature of him or her. On the other hand, the film depicts Joel and Clem as 'made for one another'.
4. Many moments are psychologically 'deep', though in clichéd ways: the images of Joel sucking his thumb while curled up on the floor; or Joel, in a reenactment of the Little Hans story, playing the fort-da game with a yo-yo under a kitchen table. Clem is more than a woman, she is Thanatos for Joel. The skeletal imagery which is tied to her, the feigned suicides and games of suffocation the couple play point to a desire for death. Perhaps Clem becomes a figment of Joel's imagination, transformed into a kind of Beatrice who leads him through his unconscious. Her angelic-bitchy traits seem impossibly encapsulated within a single character.³⁴
5. The future does not look hopeful for the couple. Clem is most likely an alcoholic, and the film takes pains to show her drinking heavily day and night. Joel's drawings of her as Vampire/Harpy can be understood as his rage about this. Alcohol and infidelity are often coterminous, and Clem's extrovert, sexually-loose personality makes us wonder about what she really does. She says she feels bored, restless and trapped. Joel is figured as depressive, and a sequence of his sketches (shown as flash frames) plays out a suicide. Neither is he a good partner: stuck in repetitive, hostile behaviour, he says things

book-reading girl whom Joel notes says 'li-bary' yet works at a Barnes & Noble in a fairly prosperous section of Long Island. Why these changes? Perhaps so our sympathy will stay with Joel: Clem, as a member of a lower social class, is a less valuable commodity and therefore more erasable.

35 In one of the film's abundant uses of the match cut, we move from ice to concrete. Later we will move from sand in Joel's bedroom to sand on the beach. In an aural match cut, the sounds of the timpani in the Barnes & Noble shift to thuds in Rob and Carrie's living room.

36 Recorded birdsong and dogs' cries also mark the pleasures and vicissitudes of heterosexual pairing. Dogs bark when Patrick makes an advance on Clem, or Hollis and Mierzwiak confront one another. Bird calls are linked to the romantic leads.

sure to enrage Clem and, though we do not see it, we get the sense that these conversations are repeated.

6. Progress, for Joel and Clem, seems to lie in developing a tolerance for what each finds difficult in the other and trying to talk to one another, though this talk turns out to consist of lines they have said before. Against this bleak picture we have a lot of Hollywood happy fluff: running around in the snow, using chopsticks as if they were elephants' trunks, rolling in and out of bed. Yet one moment may carry more weight. In long shot, we see Clem laughing, pushing Joel down on the ice and telling him 'it won't crack or break'. The ice can be taken as a metaphor for the relationship's solidity.³⁵ The discussion of the constellations, shot from overhead as the couple seems to float on a sheet of ice, also suggests the characters' and filmmakers' hunger for apotheosis.
7. The film presents one potentially valuable suggestion about the politics of how we are linked to one another. When Joel tries to extricate himself from Clem, much of his life's fabric comes undone. The film suggests this through imagery of vortices: Joel and Clem are yanked down a drain, and Joel suffocates at the other end; Joel crawls through a quasi-birth canal composed of bed linen and then winds up 'on the other side' on a sheet of ice – at this point, a fitting metaphor for nothingness. Joel, as an Orpheus who ventures into the unconscious, risks much. He loses the memory of his most beloved childhood object-choice, his Huckleberry Hound doll. We note at the same time, though, that his memories are presented as if they are everyone's – incredibly ordinary.
8. The film contains no speaking roles for people of colour. Instead, kitsch objects suggest a hunger for a richer, less 'white' life: Clem's use of phrases like 'vamanos, señor!', folk-art potato dolls, posada day skeletons, Chinese meals and Bollywood film music. The bric-a-brac filling the frame also suggests a relation between art and nature: here, art is created out of a fear of separation from, and desire to return to, nature. Filigree, plants and ornamental clothing (often featuring butterflies or flowers) that surround especially Clem suggest a link to the natural world. So too do the heaps of woollens and fur in which the couple are often bundled up. The frequent return to liminal spaces – such as a frozen lake's edge with cars in the distance, a snowy seaside with a bed on the shore, a little boy gazing out at the rain through a window, houses taken back by the sea – help to underscore the boundary between civilization and the wilderness. Gondry grew up on the border between a forest and a Versailles suburb, and questions of nature come to the fore. *Eternal Sunshine's* depictions of animals reflect this fraught relation between people and the natural world. Carrie and Rob's dog gets shooed away without the chance to say its piece. A bird calls, and we might wonder whether the bird in the children's wagon is its mate.³⁶ Animal calls woven throughout the

soundtrack suggest that the claims of nature are one of the film's secrets.

9. It is unclear how *Eternal Sunshine*'s mechanisms work. Joel's unreeling mind and a predatory erasure machine are clearly engaged in a struggle. From this, however, we cannot infer why a search through Joel's youth has been abandoned in favour of the last memories of Clem (his mind's free association, a sensing that time is up?). Nor do we know whence came the sudden spur to imagine Clem's made-up goodbye, nor why Joel's mind recreates Clem as a guide rather than a vindictive bitch. (What mechanism causes our dream content sometimes to shame or terrify us, and sometimes to comfort or encourage us?) Whatever narrative pressures have accrued, the film's final third becomes profoundly anti-narrative. As we experience Joel's free-associations and fantasies, we have the sense of looking directly into another's mind. Machines and minds (in their repetitious feedback loops and sometime associative detours) may resemble music. Is music linked to the unconscious?
10. One might argue that *Eternal Sunshine* offers some common wisdom: we cannot predict the actions of people we love, grasp what it is we love about them, know all parts of our psyche, or alter the past, so we will make mistakes. But perhaps (according to such a reading) we *can* choose to affirm this part of our condition. In *Eternal Sunshine* Joel neither knows what part of him loves Clem, nor can he prevent her from destroying their relationship. Near the film's end, Joel plays the tape of his rant about Clem (an eloquent illustration of the ways our unconscious selves emerge regardless of attempts at self-control). Joel cannot undo his negative responses to Clem's desire for a family or a more present companion. Even while destroying his brain, Joel cannot break free from his memories: as the Lacuna process takes hold, he cannot control each memory's arrival or its effect on him. Nevertheless, as *Eternal Sunshine* progresses, Joel appears to gain acceptance of life's predicament: he smiles winsomely as Clem scolds him during a meal at a Chinese restaurant and as she steals a piece of chicken off his plate during a beach picnic (the film's most generous gestures are tied to food).

However, the film complicates these commonplaces through technique, contradictory statements and narrative structure. The dazzling array of flashbacks, flash-forwards, disparate music-video-like scenes and inset narratives isolate Joel's moments of self-awareness and blindness. Just as *Eternal Sunshine* presents two incommensurabilities about relationships – either our love-object is destined for us or it is arbitrary – it presents three incommensurabilities in the realm of knowledge. Joel accrues an authentic wisdom: the kind many report attaining through meditation, prayer, psychotherapy, ageing, AA groups or hard knocks. Joel gathers partial knowledge through the effects of sci-fi procedures: the memory traces emerging from his consciousness and

37 See Steve Shavro, 'Emotion capture: affect in digital film', *Projections*, vol 1, no. 2 (2007), pp. 37–55.

the cassette tape Joel and Clem now have, which will help them reflect on past modes of relating. Joel gains no knowledge at all: at the film's end Joel and Clem must begin again. Are these repetitions or repetitions with turns?³⁷ Is this a Hollywood ending or a trope on one? The film's enigmatic ending and the film's multiple, incommensurable perspectives belong to the structural devices of music video: they nudge the viewer to watch the video again. Thus one senses the creaking mechanisms of the film's structure. In its oscillating incompleteness, the film's constellation of possibilities about self-knowledge, history and memory take on no greater importance than the other threads. The viewer is again plunged into the texture of the film. *Eternal Sunshine* is truly prismatic. One cannot catch its true meaning.

As in a music video, in *Eternal Sunshine* things refuse to add up. The fine web of connections is so densely interlaced with musical materials that it is difficult to know how anything works. What we can say is that music videos and this film accomplish different things and create different effects than do classical Hollywood films. People here are depicted as fragmented, patchwork constructions, but because people's lives are made up of the same cultural materials they are at the same time interconnected. This hints at the possibility of solidarity, or even a kind of sympathy – a sense that people listening to one another can establish the coordination normally possible through collective musical activity. But personal relations are shown as finally mysterious. All that remains, one may feel, is a kind of pure *affect* – the charge or valence of emotions that seem to exceed their stimuli.

Eternal Sunshine's characters are less than coherent. They may thus less resemble traditional Hollywood characters than real-life acquaintances in late modernity; particularly as such acquaintances begin to fade in memory. Memory can render people as fragmented and incomplete; memories of people may also coalesce into something colourless or split into polar opposites. Meanwhile musicians in ensembles can produce texts that suggest a model state of receptive coordination. Auteurist music video directors like Mark Romanek and Hype Williams produce images that exist in so graceful a relation to the music that their visual lines become part of the music; the directors become session musicians. Similarly the actors in *Eternal Sunshine* are intertwined in the deepest of ways, even though many of the most important connections involve an absence: Joel confronts Patrick, who appears as a head without a face; he sketches Clem as a skeleton in a tableau; Mary, Clem and Joel bond over an exchanged cassette tape. Such a high degree of heterogeneous interconnection is rare in feature films, but it represents an ideal of music and music video.

Nicholas Cook claims that once music–image relations form, meaning becomes volatile and unstable.³⁸ In *Eternal Sunshine*, elements like a child's plane, a hammer and a lamp take on a strange animus. *Eternal Sunshine* contains many moments when the soundtrack seems to hold the answer, when it drives the image. I have spoken to a good number of

38 Nicholas Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 81–4.

people who report loving the film yet needing to watch it again. They feel they have not grasped it. What does it mean when mainstream culture produces illegible sounds and objects?

Music videos, like *Eternal Sunshine*, embody certain kinds of experience: intensity, condensation, transience. Music disappears from us while we are listening. Similarly, the semiotically overloaded imagery, in its relation to the music, comes so fast that we cannot fully experience it. The temporal distortions in *Eternal Sunshine* are bewildering: the film contains five layers of flash-forwards and flashbacks in the first twenty minutes. *Eternal Sunshine*'s sense of time is often ambiguous, in part, because we cannot fully ascertain a memory's status. But music video too deals with jumbled and indeterminate time, simply in the fact that the image might be projecting forward while the song's lyrics, harmony or arrangement points to the past.

Both music video and music-video-influenced films rely on montage sequences – the music video directors' speciality. While a narrative film might have one or two such sequences, *Eternal Sunshine* has five. The role and importance of montage also shift in this film. Perhaps *Eternal Sunshine*'s most powerful moment comes during its final montage sequence, in which Joel remembers first meeting Clem. Here we have a subliminal case: both montage and narrative. How strange for a montage sequence to be the most memorable and touching moment of the film, to carry the film's main theme.

Why is this sequence so affecting? The image streams from right to left, while most films favour a left-to-right motion. The darkness and passing lights of a night drive elicit a state of melancholy reflection. Joel's looking out of the back window past sand and aeroplanes onto a projected tableau suggests a screen onto childhood. Over-lit happy images of the couple, spliced in as subliminal frames against images of friends carrying files like office drones, elicit a sense of loss. Something that appears to be a sledge rests on a pile of bric-a-brac, a 'Rosebud' image. The out-of-tune piano reiterates pitches in the upper register, hinting that something has gone missing or has been forgotten. But these details fail to capture the power of the sequence. At some level we are left with just affect and the mystery of music–image relations.

One might wish to decry this new 'glance aesthetics' which destroys the Bazinian 'world of looking'. But this aesthetic springs from somewhere – from music video's attempt to speak to popular music, to showcase its form, to make image musical. This new visual style, based on musicality, dislocation, free-association, flux, colour and texture, leaves us with a sense of sometimes being grounded in, sometimes hovering over, our bodies. These musical films may yet help us learn something about ourselves.

Fictual factions: on the emergence of a documentary style in recent Cuban films

EDNA M. RODRÍGUEZ-MANGUAL

The technical reproducibility is excluded from testimony, which always calls for the presence of the live voice in the first person. . . . And it is perhaps here, with the technological both as ideality and prosthetic iterability, that the possibility of fiction and lie, simulacrum and literature, that of the right to literature insinuates itself, at the very origin of truthful testimony, autobiography in good faith, sincere confession, as their essential compossibility.¹

In straightforward terms, documentary film ‘purports to present factual information about the world outside the film’.² In its most ideal form – in other words, without the ‘purporting’ part – a documentary maintains a strict correspondence between the world outside the film and the world within the film. If a one-to-one correspondence could be attained or otherwise maintained, representation would be a flawless process. But while documentary film purports to be based on facts, in the technological process of filmmaking itself some element of fiction must exist: something is inserted into, or left out of, the film that either was or was not in existence in the outside world. As Derrida states in the epigraph here, fiction and fact are ‘compossible’ in autobiographical and testimonial literature, just as they might be in documentary film. Thus, I begin with an initial definition of documentary film as simply a ‘factual fiction’. There are facts (some hard nuggets of information that transfer from outside world to film), but those facts are reframed and re-presented in and on film, opening a space for fiction.

- 1 Jacques Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 42.
- 2 David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art*, 5th edition (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1997), p. 42.

In the first part of this essay, I examine some of the tensions such a paradoxical definition has created in current discussions on documentary film, provoking questions as to where the line might be drawn between fact and fiction, particularly when confronted with concrete political realities. To further these queries, the second part of the essay examines two contemporary films about Cubans that have been classified as documentaries. These films are both set in Cuba, but made by outsiders: the 1999 German production *Buena Vista Social Club*, directed by Wim Wenders, and *Balseros/Cuban Rrafters*, produced in Spain and created by the Spaniards Carlos Bosch and Josép M. Doménech in 2002. Both of these films, in their own way, have striking similarities to what Fatimah Tobing Rony, following the work of James Clifford, has discussed as the 'salvage method' of ethnography, whereby the role of the anthropologist is to record and reconstruct the already vanishing culture of the other.

The third part of this essay then looks at three documentaries. The first two were produced by Cuban filmmakers with money from within the island: *Suite Habana* (Fernando Pérez, 2003) and *Si me comprendieras/If You Only Understood* (Rolando Díaz, 1998). *Si me comprendieras* is basically a fiction film but is made to look like a documentary (and indeed is often classified as such), using a 'behind the scenes' approach in which women are interviewed as they audition for a role in a musical that never actually takes place. *Suite Habana*, on the other hand, was filmed as a documentary portraying real people going about their everyday life. Yet through highly-stylized sound, mise-en-scene and editing, it begins to take on the appearance of a fiction film. I conclude with an analysis of *Quién diablos es Juliette?/Who the Hell is Juliette?* (Carlos Marcovich, Mexico, 1997), another 'documentary' made by an outsider. Only here, I suggest, the 'facts' are reinvented through a montage in which the director becomes the editor, and the Cuban subjects (especially Juliette) become actors and agents. Thus, in the end, I propose that the factual fiction of Cuban documentary is inverted to become, as the title of my essay suggests, a 'fictual faction'. In a double move, the fiction of documentary is assumed, turned on its head, and a kind of 'fact' is produced from a preceding fiction. In this way, there is no assumption of a preexisting fact from which fiction is produced. Rather, fiction and fact are *compossible* from the beginning: there are no facts without fiction, and no fiction without some sort of factual grounding. Such intersections become critical for understanding political realities, both inside and outside of a region.

The origins of documentary film dovetail with the origins of cinema itself, for what else are the beautiful fifty-second films that the Lumière Brothers produced throughout the 1890s but 'documentaries'?³ The outside world and filmed world were there portrayed in relatively coterminous times and coextensive places. The magic of cinema was

3 André Gaudreault questions the relation of fact and fiction, couched in terms of narrative, in his essay, 'Film, narrative, narration: the cinema of the Lumière Brothers', in Thomas Elsaesser (ed.), *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative* (London: British Film Institute, 1990), pp. 68–75.

4 Felix-Louis Regnault filmed a Senegalese woman during the Paris Exposition, Ethnographique de l'Afrique Occidentale in 1895.

immediately situated within the technology itself: the ability to reproduce the world in a way unmatched by any previous technical apparatus. As some films, beginning most notably with those of Georges Méliès, created ever-more fanciful worlds on screen, other filmmakers continued to point their cameras towards the actual world. Viewers remained split in their filmic desires. On the one hand, viewers continued their cravings for sensational worlds that could only exist on screen, but on the other hand, they also desired to see the real world in new ways, especially parts of the world that they have never before seen.

Anthropologists in particular were able to utilize emerging film technologies for ethnographic research, documenting the world beyond the film theatre. The first so-called ethnographic film, made at the same time as the Lumière brothers' first films, was that of Félix-Louis Regnault, and the reason *his* film was ethnographic is because it was a film about 'the other', in this case, a West African woman making a pot.⁴ The Lumières simply showed the world of the *same*, the streets of Paris, immediately recognizable to their film viewers. But there is some strange attractor in documentary that must show something *other*, something exotic. Thus, there are two tensions central to documentary. The first is the tension between fiction and fact. The second is the tension between filmmaker and film viewer, on the one side, and the subject being filmed – the other.

In time, documentary became a genre unto itself, complete with its own style, while it continued to be pushed ahead by ever-newer technological developments, most importantly the portability of the camera and synchronous sound. These two inventions allowed the filmmakers to meet their subjects in the subject's own space and time, and allowed the subjects to speak for themselves rather than rely on post-synchronized sound – typically voiceovers or music. Different styles of documentary filmmaking, cinema verité and direct cinema, emerged from these new technologies. And with this, the myth of objectivity was heightened.

Along with the rise of this direct cinema, an increasing split developed between fiction and documentary film, with each side creating a generic lineage that continues today: the factual (truth and reality) stand on one side, and the fictional (art and artifice) stand on the other. Eliot Weinberger describes the work of documentarians and ethnographers thus:

They worship a terrifying deity known as Reality, whose eternal enemy is its evil twin, Art. They believe that to remain vigilant against this evil, one must devote oneself to a set of practices known as Science. Their cosmology, however, is unstable: for decades they have fought bitterly among themselves as to the nature of their god and how best to serve him. They accuse each other of being secret followers of Art; the worst insult in their language is 'aesthete'.⁵

Yet today many viewers, both in academia and among the viewing public at large, have developed a scepticism towards the 'truth' of

5 Eliot Weinberger, 'The camera people', in Lucien Taylor (ed.), *Visualizing Theory: Selected Essays from V.A.R., 1990–1994* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994), p. 4.

6 Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and the Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 101.

7 Donna Haraway, 'Teddy bear patriarchy: taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908–1936', *Social Text*, no. 11 (Winter 1984–85), p. 25. Quoted in Rony, *The Third Eye*, p. 102.

8 Richard Meran Barsam, 'Robert Flaherty: the man in the iron myth', in Barsam (ed.), *Nonfiction Film Theory and Criticism* (New York, NY: E.P. Dutton, 1973), p. 234. Quoted in Rony, *The Third Eye*, p. 102.

9 Trinh T. Minh-Ha, 'Documentary is/not a name', *October*, no. 52 (1990), pp. 76–98.

10 Dogme 95 is a collective of film directors founded in Copenhagen in spring 1995, URL: <http://www.dogme95.dk> [accessed 6 July 2008].

11 John Baldessari, quoted in Coosje van Bruggen, *John Baldessari* (New York, NY: Rizzoli, 1990), p. 36.

documentary film. The past twenty years have seen a number of criticisms raised against early documentary film and documentary's subset and anthropological kin the ethnographic film. Early documentarians tended to objectify their subjects through the camera lens in what could be called a 'colonizing impulse'. Rony and Donna Haraway, in different contexts, each speak of such ethnographic films as 'taxidermy'. Rony states 'Taxidermy seeks to make that which is dead look as if it were still living',⁶ while Haraway claims 'Taxidermy fulfils the fatal desire to represent, to be whole; it is a politics of reproduction'.⁷ Documentary would function as one might collect butterflies in a camera's net, to etherize them, and pin the acquired objects to a wall, on display for all to see. What existed in the outside world now would exist on display in some sort of secondarily real, but artfully arranged, world. Through the combination of both art and science, the artifice of art can actually serve to create a 'better' reality, one more real. As the early documentarian Robert Flaherty (director of *Nanook of the North* [1922]) stated: 'One often has to distort a thing to catch its true spirit'.⁸ He has been soundly critiqued in recent years for his distortions, yet there is something in this statement that points towards the constructed nature of cultural reality together with the artifice of audiovisual technologies.

The notion that documentary has a style is important to emphasize, for this brings us some way towards understanding the always occurring slippage between fact and fiction, and the creation of a 'factual fiction'. Filmmaker and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha lays out several of the components involved in the 'aesthetic of objectivity': the directional microphone (to select particular sounds); lip-synchronous sound; 'real time' instead of film time, thus the long-take with minimal or no editing; the wide-angle lens (as opposed to the closeup which shows too much partiality); the handheld camera since it is both mobile *and* invisible (don't let them see you filming, just act natural); and, relatedly, the subject should not look into the camera (remember, act natural – pay no attention to the man behind the curtain).⁹ These essentials to objective filmmaking have, ironically, emerged as a unique style to the point where fiction films will mimic their functions for other purposes. The Danish manifesto *Dogme 95*, spearheaded by Lars Von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, calls for many of these documentary styles to be brought into their fictional films, and labels it a 'vow of chastity'.¹⁰

Of course, one quickly realizes that, for instance, even with a long-take there is still a beginning and ending to a film, a marked chronological border. Something in afilmic reality took place before the film began and after it was over. Likewise, the camera, even with a wide-angle lens, still consists of a rectangular space with edges that excise a world outside the frame. What art will always have to offer science is an awareness of the frame. As artist John Baldessari puts it: 'What the camera has done is show us what to concentrate upon; and consequently, what to leave out'.¹¹ Art, in any medium, deals with frames, with what gets left in and what gets left out of the space of representation.

12 A.O. Scott, 'Beyond reality, to truth', *New York Times*, Arts and Leisure section, 25 June 2000.

13 Elizabeth Cowie, 'The spectacle of actuality', in Jane M. Gaines and Michael Renov (eds), *Collecting Visible Evidence*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 19.

14 Michael Chanan, *Cuban Cinema* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 148.

In a 2000 *New York Times* article entitled 'Beyond reality, to truth', A.O. Scott highlights some of the tensions between fact and fiction in film. He blatantly admits: 'One of the reasons we go to the movies, after all, is to be fooled by the truth ... we display an appetite for reality matched only by our craving for fantasy'.¹² This two-part desire is brought out also by Elizabeth Cowie in an essay, 'The spectacle of actuality', where she states:

Documentary is associated with seriousness ... yet, for all its seriousness, the documentary film nevertheless also involves more disreputable features of cinema usually associated with the entertainment film, namely, the pleasures and fascination of film as spectacle. In the documentary film these pleasures arise not through make-believe or fictional enactment but by the *re-presentation of actuality*. ... On the one hand there is a desire for reality held and reviewable for analysis as a world of materiality available to scientific and rational knowledge, a world of evidence confirmed through observation and logical interpretation. ... On the other hand there is a desire for the real not as knowledge but as image, as spectacle. Jean Baudrillard argues that 'there is a kind of primal pleasure, of anthropological joy in images, a kind of brute fascination unencumbered by aesthetic, moral, social or political judgements'.¹³

The two-part desire for fact *and* fiction, truth *and* fantasy, is crossed with the other important tension of documentary, the desire to see the other. A spectacle is nothing else but an image of something strange, something unknown, something other.

With this in mind, I turn to an intriguing change in documentary films in Cuba over the last decade-and-a-half since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuba's most significant economic partner. This time has come to be called the 'Special Period'. As Michael Chanan has pointed out, the historical moment of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 was also a period of aesthetic revolution in documentary cinema.¹⁴ For many years thereafter, documentary filmmaking in Cuba benefited from all the avant-garde movements, including cinema verité, and this created an aesthetic explosion within the documentaries filmed on the island. Nevertheless, these new tendencies of filmmaking were accommodated within the new ideals that the Revolution brought.

However, the utopian ideals that dominated documentary filmmaking in Cuba at the beginning of the Revolution have disappeared. Although the rhetoric of wanting to change society and educate the people through the media is still present, the economic reality of the Special Period that started in the early 1990s – mainly the lack of state support for film documentaries – has brought changes to documentary filmmaking over the last decade. Still, even today, all the renowned directors on the island were originally trained to make documentaries, and have gone on to

make feature (fiction) films, which are considered a step forward in their careers since supposedly they have gone from filming short 'reality' reels to actually being 'artists'. But in the films made by Cubans that I will be commenting on later (*Si me comprendieras* and *Suite Habana*), the split between the factual and the fictional techniques are mixed and reinvented in this new period when there is little budget for documentaries. All of the feature films produced today are variously coproduced with other countries in order to be financially viable.

Although the same representational slippages occur in the documentaries about Cuba that are created by filmmakers from outside the island, the product is a bit different. The Cuban Revolution had the effect of making the relatively small island visible internationally, even as it simultaneously veiled it from the North American and European popular consciousness due to economic embargoes and restrictions on travel. This process of estrangement has resulted in an appetite for knowing the 'real' Cuba, the world beyond, the other, but from the perspective of our own cravings for some exoticized paradise fantasy.

This perspective is highlighted in the documentary *Buena Vista Social Club* by German filmmaker Wenders, who demonstrates in his film many of the issues at stake in the factual fictions of documentary. Wenders went to Cuba after his longtime musical collaborator, Ry Cooder, had gone there. Along with Juan de Marcos (who was the insider), they collected musicians and eventually produced the Grammy-award-winning musical album of the same name. Wenders's documentary remains true to the original spirit of the album, including many of the songs shown in live performance, but it fills out details of the musicians' lives. Wenders helped to give voice to these 'other' forgotten musicians. (Never mind that German and British companies hold all the copyrights and licensing rights for the music.)

In spite of the fantastic music that Europeans and Americans have been able to hear as a result of the Buena Vista productions, the album and the film remain rooted in Clifford's notion of the 'salvage paradigm' of ethnography, in which a dominant culture may distort, mystify or destroy a subordinate one on the premiss that it may disappear if they do not preserve it. Anthropologist Rony takes up Clifford's notions of salvage ethnography, claiming that 'a central premise of much of anthropology was that the native was always already vanishing, and the anthropologist could do nothing but record and reconstruct, racing against the evolutionary clock'.¹⁵

Wenders is not an ethnographer, but many of his comments and films contain striking similarities to the salvage method of ethnography. Wenders parallels such a paradigm when he quotes Cézanne: 'Things are disappearing. If you want to see anything, you have to hurry'. Wenders then goes on to add:

Something happens, you see it happening, you film it as it happens, the camera sees it and records it, and you can look at it again, afterwards.

¹⁵ Rony, *The Third Eye*, pp. 90–91.

16 Wim Wenders, *The Logic of Images*, trans Michael Hoffman (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), pp. 1–2.

The thing itself may no longer be there, but you can still see it, the fact of its existence hasn't been lost. The act of filming is a heroic act (not always, not often, but sometimes). For a moment, the gradual destruction of the world of appearances is held up. The camera is a weapon against the tragedy of things, against their disappearing.¹⁶

Wenders's camera, then, takes on a historical function, bringing that which is fading back into the light. This can be seen in a sequence of the film that starts with a shot of Rubén González looking at some pictures from 1946 and telling the camera who is still alive and who is dead. After this shot, there is a cut to Ibrahim Ferrer talking about the dead musicians in a nostalgic tone, and the film cuts again to Cooder commenting on how he heard about the musicians. This nostalgia is extended if one notices the *mise-en-scène*: the cars that populate the streets are old 1940s and 1950s Fords, while the East European models that are ever-present in Havana today have been left out of the frame. A few minutes after this sequence, Cooder is shown on the plane with a voiceover telling how the project started. He highlights how they found a generation of forgotten musicians who carried on the tradition of Cuban popular music, and how he and the other producers were able to resurrect their careers. This is also the promotional story that accompanies the CDs, videos, cassettes and all the products that have since been sold.

While there is indeed a 'rescue' operation going on here, it is important to note that the rescue can be seen to operate under the guise of the capitalist marketplace triumphing over the onslaught of the remains of Cuba's communism. The film does not explicitly claim this, but there is something in the filming of it that led several reviewers to claim the music had been forgotten by the Revolution. This is not the case, as many of the players were playing into the 1970s and 1980s and, moreover, most of them had not ceased playing.

Rony highlights another side to the salvage mode of ethnography. While it is a race against a perceived destruction, 'it was also a race backwards, to a less cluttered, simpler past. . . . Often accompanying [the salvage] premise, however, was "abstracted" guilt, as a nostalgia for lost origins, and as fear – contemplation of death in the abstract leading to contemplation of one's own death'.¹⁷ *Buena Vista Social Club* is both a race against the clock of destruction (many of these musicians, the film takes care to point out, are in their seventies, eighties and even nineties) as well as nostalgia for lost origins. What is revealed in *Buena Vista Social Club*, as with many documentaries, is something about the filmmaker's own desires (and perhaps, too, something about the viewers' desires).

From the very beginning of the film, it is clear that the project is one of recovering lost origins. The film opens with Compay Segundo riding in an old car and the filmmakers on a search for what used to be the Buena Vista Social Club. And true to the nature of all myths, we quickly find that there is no one single point of origin. Each person interviewed, when

17 Rony, *The Third Eye*, pp. 90–91.

18 Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: the Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 5. Russell takes these ideas originally from Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1983).

asked for the location of the Social Club, tells of its existence in a different location. It seems to be a fact that it did indeed exist at one point in time, but everyone has different ideas about where it was actually located. Stories abound, always a little bit more embroidered, and thus the myth is kept alive. Note, however, that this search for the origin is intercut with a contemporary concert in Amsterdam. Part of what Wenders suggests is that the Buena Vista Social Club actually exists right there, in 1997, in Amsterdam. The search for what has past is found in the present.

The film continues to play out the nostalgic desire for the past through a constant solitary filming. Musicians are set in large empty rooms where they tell their life stories, or they are filmed sitting in these rooms while their own voiceovers tell their life stories. The effect of these images is clearly nostalgic, as one can only imagine these spaces full of life in a more glorious past. For example, Amadito Valdés is shown in an empty bar, his drums in a corner, emphasizing that music has been played here (and possibly may be played again), while Manuel Mirabal Vázquez, who plays the trumpet, is in an empty restaurant.

Similarly, one of the ways that this nostalgia is expressed, and in a way that mirrors the depiction of otherness, is the construction in the ethnography/documentary of historical time. Johannes Fabian notes how the culture being filmed must be shown to exist in a time just prior to the one in which the film is shown. Film 'feeds on photographic properties of preservation, fixing its referents in the prior time of shooting'.¹⁸ Thus, such films seem to save that which is already past, but they also hark back to those very times and serve fashionable 'retro' trends. This is brought out particularly towards the end of *Buena Vista Social Club*, when the musicians are all shown gathering in New York City and the camera follows them down the streets as they explore its immensity. They are from a different history, a different world. Fascination and uncertainty both accompany them. There is a particularly striking sequence in New York City that, I believe, highlights the deepest paradox of the film. Wenders plays the game of salvage, yet one must point out his care in handling his subjects. In one sequence, Rubén González is pictured with Eliades Ochoa on the Empire State Building peering out at the Statue of Liberty. Seemingly unable to gauge the massive distance across the city, a final frame of González looking out over the city intercuts to González at his piano. The western world of global capitalism and accompanying skyscrapers is suggested to be too much for the Cubans of another place and time. But the contrast is immediately struck when González is shown to be in full control of his environment as he plays his piano in front of the crowd. The musician González is able to tell his story in the end, a story of music. He is an actor, subject to the film's direction, yet at moments becomes one whose acts have resonance in the wider world.

Balseros is another docudrama that stylistically claims to unveil for outsiders the 'reality' of life in Cuba during the Special Period, specifically 1994, when Castro announced that his government would not

19 See Bill Nichols, 'The domain of documentary', in *Representing Reality* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 3–4.

stop boats carrying refugees from leaving Cuba. Many people at this time set sail for the USA. A film crew of reporters, directed by Carlos Bosch and codirected by Josep M. Doménech, followed seven individuals from their departure in makeshift rafts to their internment for many months in Guantanamo, and on to their life as exiles in the USA. The filmmakers revisited them five and then seven years later, following them around to many cities, including Miami, the Bronx, York in Pennsylvania, Grand Isle in Nebraska and Albuquerque in New Mexico. They wanted to show what their destiny had been after their departure from the island. The film presents a fascinating spectacle of a historical event in condensed filmic time, emphasizing the factual aspects through the use of a handheld camera, the way in which the subjects speak and look towards the lens, and the intercutting of some street or television footage from 1994. For example, there are instances when Fidel Castro and then Bill Clinton are on news reports. Castro is talking on Cuban national television, affirming that he will order that nobody should stop anyone else from leaving the island, while Clinton, on the other hand, is shown on Fox news affirming that illegal refugees from Cuba will not be allowed to enter the USA. Meanwhile the film depicts people in Cuba and the USA watching these news reports. Politics and personal identity, the public and the private, are intertwined here.

The status of documentary film is used here as 'evidence', legitimizing its usage as a source of knowledge in a sobering sort of way, seemingly direct, immediate and transparent.¹⁹ However, the selection and arrangement of the facts do not escape the illusionistic, image-based structure of fictive narrative. The people interviewed, for the most part, are narrating their stories with a voiceover in a kind of testimonial. They are looking back at their own past, and the film records them as they reconstruct and analyze the past events, which for the most part results in nostalgia and regret for the individuals concerned. These people may be thought of as social actors instead of fictional characters; however, their stories have become fictional factors by the use of continuity editing, the invocation of offscreen space and narrative film methods of character development. The representation of historical reality here is framed and organized as a synecdoche, in which a few stories attempt to represent the whole.

When the credits start at the beginning of the film, the photographs panned in slow motion are exclusively black-and-white images from Cuba (only one from the USA: a car driving on the snow), and this presentation is accompanied by the soft tone of a piano (music composed by Cuban artist Lucrecia, who lives in Spain) as background music. From the start, the ambience created is one of nostalgia for the island. Soon after, the voiceover of Oscar del Valle, one of the protagonists, recalls the hijack of the ferry of Regla and, according to his interpretation, it is this incident which is a catalyst for the chaos that causes Castro to open the borders for whoever wants to leave. The images at this point have a sensationalist quality to them, emphasized by music, police cars with

20 URL: http://www.bausanfilms.com/largo_balseros.htm [accessed 6 July 2008].

sirens speeding through the streets of Havana, and people marching and shouting 'Throw the traitors out'. At first, this montage seems to offer the unique opportunity of revisiting an actual historical moment, but soon after it also, through the cracks, shows the craft behind the scene, the 'purporting' element of documentary making.

A promotional tag reads, 'This is a true story about some of the authentic survivors of our times'.²⁰ Once again there is a truth claim, even when it is only in filmmaking on the screen, whereby real time can be presented within an elliptical two hours. Here the audience can witness, through the miracle of crosscutting and parallel editing, 'video letters' being made by the filmmaking crew for the exiles and their families. While the families have been split, the film crew can traverse borders, carrying with them the technologies to link exiles with families through their screened audiovisual presence. In a second move, the filmmakers are careful to present their own activity of re-presenting; they are no longer simply filming an event, they are creating it. For example, the viewer sees Oscar del Valle, from his tent at the Guantanamo base, telling Ester (the lover he left behind in Havana and the mother of his daughter) through the camera that after nine months of celibacy, the thing he desires the most is to make love to her. At the same time, the viewer is also witnessing Ester's reaction to these words because she is also part of the screen. This elliptical time through crosscut editing is used in many instances to create a sense of connection and immediacy between the families who were left behind and the seven individuals who made it to the USA. However, it also serves as a point of disconnection. As time goes by, Miriam is the only one out of seven subjects who keeps calling back to the daughter she left behind on the island.

In a different turn from *Buena Vista Social Club*, *Balseros* deconstructs the 'American dream' of the people who emigrated to the USA thinking that everything would be better there. The seven chosen people that the film followed are no better off by the end than they were on the island. On the contrary, six of them – with the exception of Guillermo who goes to Miami to be united with his wife and daughter – have lost something valuable in the transition; they have lost their communities and their sense of belonging. They have to reconstruct their sense of identity and family and, as the film keeps pointing out, that is a high price to pay in order to gain some material advantages. This exile from their country and family is, once again, recorded by the lens, and framed with the purpose of reconstructing the past against the evolutionary clock. The shots of Oscar walking around the streets of New York City are reminiscent of those at the end of *Buena Vista Social Club*. These subjects are dislocated and set in a time and place not their own, even as the film itself reveals their loss.

Balseros seems to indicate that the modernity of the new world has ruined some of these people's hopes and changed their sense of identity. Misclaida gets divorced and ends up selling drugs, running away for her safety, and disowned by her sister (Méricys), who always

dreamed of being reunited with her. Oscar does not follow through with the promise of helping his wife and daughter, and also gets involved in gambling and crime and has to escape the city. Rafael disappears for a while, ends up isolated from his family and alone, holding on only to his religious faith. Miriam also gets divorced and, even though she remarries and has another daughter, by the end of the film she has still not managed to be reunited with Mislady's, the daughter she left behind and for whom she supposedly went to get a better life. The film may be deconstructing the actual global discourse of immigration, and subverting the claims to freedom and a better material life, but these subjects, these 'actors', are captured through a film lens that has preserved their vanishing stories and vanishing lives. It seems that authenticity, although relational as Clifford argues, is still the film's goal. There is still the split between 'home' and 'abroad', 'self' and 'other', 'savage' and 'civilized'. As we now know well, culture is never objectively observable.

Through editing and sound effects, *Balseros* demonstrates the loss and frustration of these individuals in the new promised land. One of the non-diegetic songs that often plays in the background, with its high beat and repeating chorus, points out what some of them – especially Rafael Cano – were looking for when they left the island: *un carro, una casa y una buena mujer* (a car, a house and a good woman). This song, and dream, progressively disappears as the film depicts the emigrants' lives seven years later in the new land. Rafael does not get the house or the woman, and he is involved in a car crash that leaves him handicapped. There is no up-beat music in exile, but much silence. The narration shifts from portraying a feeling of everlasting joy, even in the midst of deprivation, to an overall feeling of sadness and even nostalgia in the midst of relative comfort in the new territory. If only they could return to their simpler past, the film seems to suggest. In a way, they all feel nostalgia because they believed from the beginning in the framed fictional world of a fantasy dream – everything will be better over there, or so films can make viewers believe. And then, when the real 'promised land' disappoints, films like *Balseros* can offer a nostalgic look back at the old life.

In the end, even while purporting to be a record of a historical event – factual information about the emigration wave from Cuba in 1994 – *Balseros* is a factual fiction since it derives fiction from facts, primarily through editing.

This final section turns the 'factual fictions' of documentary upside down as I examine two films made in Cuba and one produced in Mexico. Here, the possibility of a 'fictual faction' emerges, where a fiction provides the basis for documented film facts.

Si me comprendieras (1998), directed by the Cuban Rolando Díaz, is catalogued outside Cuba as a documentary, although it is really a fiction film, a 'mockumentary' perhaps. It breaks with most of the conventions

of documentary while simultaneously parodying them. It contains just enough of the documentary style (handheld camera, interviews with subjects and interviews with people in the street) to trigger a sense of *actuality* (verisimilitude) in the viewer's mind, but the divergences from documentary are important to note. The director speaks off camera at the very beginning, saying that he wanted to make a musical but could not raise the money. Nonetheless, he proceeds with the task of auditioning a number of women for the parts, so the film becomes a documentary of the process of making a musical that never takes place. He does not quite confess this fact to his players, who still act as if they may someday be stars, while he keeps the cameras rolling. Diaz also playfully states offscreen at the beginning that the viewer should not expect to see him onscreen because as a director he will always be behind the lens. When the credits roll at the end, the voice of the director is not that of Diaz himself, so an actor has been playing the role of the narrator-director. One of the last shots of the film, in fact, is of a chair in the middle of a street in Havana that reads 'director', and it is empty, as if he has become a fictional character in the film, a character that is never there visually. From the very beginning, the film plays with the factual part of the documentary. By inserting fiction in the aesthetic of documentary filmmaking, Diaz creates a poetics of documentary style that constantly subverts the 'aesthetic of objectivity' that this genre is based on. Here the documentary becomes a documentary about a failed fiction, that is, the musical. The factual is based on a primary fiction.

Si me comprendieras begins to deconstruct objectivity by displaying the *estimated* date on which the film is supposed to be taking place: 'Havana, Year 2000, more or less', without claiming any historical precision. The film oscillates between showing the audience what seem to be highly reliable data and just faking it. The film shows interviews of the eight women who are auditioning for the parts, and as subjects they look directly at the camera, confessing their own emotionally complicated family lives. For example, in the case of Anais, her mother lives in the USA and left her when she was only three years old. She met her dad for the first time when she was sixteen years old and has not seen him since. In the case of Alina, her daughter feels self conscious of her skin colour because she is darker than the rest of the family, which brings issues of race into the film; her dad is black but he is not involved in her life so she feels abandoned and out of place. In the case of Alicia, she is also affected by the divorce of her parents and the medical condition of her brother, who had meningitis when he was very young and is now deaf mute. The women's desperate economic situation is shown by their dingy or crumbling homes, their personal struggles to survive the economic situation during the Special Period and their lack of resources.

Yet the film also 'fakes' the facts by literally staging in front of the camera what is being said. For example, when Alina, the first of the women to be interviewed, tells the story of how she was left out of a show, there is a cut, and white letters on a black screen say 'Alina's

acting test'. The test is the recreation of a conversation between Alina and the assistant director in which he announces she did not pass the audition. At the end of the conversation there is the diegetical offscreen sound of the voice of the director saying 'cut'. This happens again when Flor, another auditioner/interviewee, has a conversation with the producer of a play she has written. The producer tells her that he no longer wants to participate in the production due to its highly controversial views on race and racism. The fictional reenactment of these episodes points towards the complexity of representation as fact and fiction become intertwined. Diaz unveils the transition from a 'created' afilmic reality to the profilmic reality on the screen. He points out that not only is representation not flawless but also that it is *all* reframed, *all* reenacted.

As the camera rolls, people in the street are asked what they would like to see a film about, or how they think this musical should end. People respond that they would like to see a film about Cuba's reality. One says that it should be the type of film that makes you think. This self-reflective element is present in the film through constantly interrogating the process of representing 'reality' and playing with it, but not claiming that this representation is in any way accurate. The film also questions who has the authority to speak for a group's identity or authenticity. One of the people being interviewed is a woman from the Netherlands, who states that she would like to see how people live in Cuba today. Again, we find the documentary interest in the 'other's' reality. The film plays with this pervasive desire for information in the form of a story about the exotic island of Cuba seen through foreign eyes. A shot of a man walking in the streets holding an ice cream is accompanied by the voiceover of the director/narrator stating: 'This is a Cuban man, eating a Cuban ice cream'.

It is no coincidence that the leading role in the musical is supposedly going to be for a black Cuban, or mulatta. For many male tourists these women have become a commodity. The film plays with this exoticized other at the same time as it brings serious issues of race to the screen. On the one hand, the director/narrator says: 'Black and mulatto women are the synthesis of so many things. Maybe it is the result of their exaggeration: sensual, party-loving, deep, mysterious, direct, musical, unpredictable. A popular proverb says they are angels six months and devils six months.' Meanwhile a series of shots of the women due to audition for the musical appear onscreen, going about their everyday life: walking, riding a bicitaxi, forming a queue. On the other hand, not only are familial tensions over race presented, like those of Alina's daughter, but there is the subplot of Flor writing plays for a black theatre group that raise the issue of racism on the island, and some scenes of her play are shown onscreen. A black actor in a play that is being reenacted for the film asks 'What do I have to do if I want to become an actor?', and the chorus responds 'Then, you have to change your colour'.

The narration at times seems to be aimed at someone who does not have first-hand knowledge of the island and provides nuggets of

information about the city, as if it were a tourist film. The opening narration sounds like a cultural analysis when it says: 'Havana is still without colour, without water, but there is more than enough music and dance. What this city needs is a good downpour. . . . We Havanans have got a good beat, rhythm. We enjoy films, and are racially mixed: a product of a convulsive but cosmopolitan and open past. No Cuban thinks of the year 2010.' Diaz is reappropriating the salvage method and the colonizing gaze, twisting it and deconstructing it by imitating and parodying the cultural reductions of other. This film shows the fragments, the cracks, it is telling stories in pieces. In so doing, it begins from a fiction (a made-up musical) but allows facts (about race, economics and social life in Cuba today) to show through.

Complicating truth and representation in a factual fiction is also what Fernando Pérez achieves in his film *Suite Habana* (2003). Also labeled a documentary, it too breaks with many of the conventions of the documentary style. Following, among others, Alberto Cavalcanti's *Nothing but Time* (1926) and Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927), *Suite Habana* shows a typical twenty-four-hours in Havana, the rhythm and pace of the urban space. In so doing it refigures the meaning of modernity in the Cuban context at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The film presents the life of the city by focusing on twelve of its inhabitants as they go about their daily business. Their twelve juxtaposed stories create a complex interpretation of the urban space from their subjective points of view. Thus the film allows for open interpretations of the 'reality' that is portrayed on the screen. However, in contrast to the normal style of documentary, the film does not show any interviews with its subjects. They do not talk; they do not even seem to notice the camera. These people, whose names and dreams the viewer gets to know intimately by the creative framing that Pérez accomplishes, are presented in their own space, through many closeups (which reinforces their partial subjectivity), and the lens enters in their surroundings and their intimate life – not as if they were others, but as if they were the ones telling the story through their actions and not their words. They are not exoticized. While watching the film in Havana in the summer of 2003, the people sitting next to me were watching the world of their own selves, recognizing something of their own life on the screen, reacting to it in familiarity. They were not gazing at an other.

Besides eschewing interviews and dialogue, this factual fiction is notable for the use of a carefully mastered mise-en-scene that stylizes the portraits of the characters and their environments. Even when the sequences were shot in the characters' houses, the positioning of the objects and props, the composition of the frame and the lighting are all highly crafted, going against what cinema verité wanted to reclaim. But this is combined with shooting in the style of cinema verité (for example when Jorge Luis is leaving the country and the camera crew is actually at the airport without any lighting, filming his real departure) and with the way the film fictionalizes the encounters of the people in the street

(Francisquito, the only child in the film, buys peanuts from Amanda, the retired textile worker; Francisco, the father, helps Ernesto, the classical ballet dancer, to repair his house; Iván, who during the day works in a hospital but at night works in a club as a transvestite, takes his shoes to be repaired by Julio). These are no coincidences, but part of a well-developed montage. This intertwined montage, which reminds one of Dziga Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), adds coherence to the representation and the narration suggested in its non-linear editing. The montage ultimately makes it possible to have the sense of watching twenty-four hours in the life of this city and its people in only eighty minutes.

It is the postsynchronized sound to which the 'suite' of the title refers, a musical composition made by the sounds of the city, that ultimately makes *Suite Habana* a fictional work of art. In some reviews it has been argued that there are a lot of silences in this film, when in fact the soundtrack is full of noise. Some are diegetic sounds, like the construction machines working in the middle of the day, the noise of an untuned television set, the background voices that come from a radio or the sound of air pushed through a fan. Others are non-diegetic, like the traditional performance by Omara Portuondo of the song *Quiéreme mucho*. There are a lot of sound bridges that connect some images with others, glueing the fragmented visuals together. But all of these sounds escape the standard verbal communication of dialogue typical of a documentary, allowing the viewer to interpret this lack as silence, as loneliness, or as other.

The film does not need to be reduced to a decision about whether it recuperates the values of the Revolution or whether it serves to denounce the downfall of the communist regime and the end of a dream, the latter a reading favoured by the Cuban community in Miami. The complexity of the reality depicted goes beyond this dichotomy to combine the factual (these are real people) and the fictional (for now they are playing their part and ignoring the camera while the post-synchronized sound ties their eighty minutes of fame together) into a new aesthetic of representation. Even when in *Suite Habana* the filmic apparatus remains virtually invisible, the myth of objectivity is dismantled by the many fragments and hermeneutic possibilities.

In a slightly different way, the Mexican director Carlos Marcovich creates his own factual fiction with *Who the Hell is Juliette?* This 1997 film is also labeled as a documentary, and for the most part it does meet most of the 'requirements' of the genre. But what it also does is reinvent the facts through a broad montage. The final effect of the film relies on the director ultimately becoming the editor and turning the peep-show on himself. Conveniently enough, Marcovich the director *is* the editor (as well as the producer and cinematographer). The director-as-editor pulls the story off by creating a montage of two women's lives: Juliette of the title, and Fabiola, the Mexican-now-New Yorker fashion model. In real life there was a music video several years ago in which both Juliette and

Fabiola played a part,²¹ though the film never mentions that Marcovich himself directed that video. As both Juliette and Fabiola seem to have lost their fathers, Marcovich saw an opportunity for telling a story that juxtaposes the two lives, and fictionalizes a continuing relationship between the two. The film is chiefly about Juliette, and her family and friends are interviewed saying what they think of her – she’s bossy, a whore, childish – while she seems to have a comeback for everybody’s comments. The viewer learns that her father left for the USA when she was six months old and never returned. A few years later her mother committed suicide by setting fire to herself. As the film unfolds we hear various viewpoints, and the truth of the matter turns out to be more complicated and contradictory. Similarly, Fabiola is in search of her father (or at least the filmmaker asks her a lot of questions about her father, often couched in terms of ‘where did you get those green eyes?’), this too becomes an interwoven web of stories told by a variety of people.

It is perhaps the action of self-referentiality that makes this ‘documentary’ unique, and that severely pushes the boundary between fact and fiction. One scene in particular shows the interconnection of the filmmaker and his object Juliette. She takes the camera and says that no one tells her what to do anymore. ‘I’m the director’, she proclaims. She aims the camera at a boy’s crotch. Now she is the one directing the gaze, doing the peeping. Then the film cuts to a scene of artificial snow and water. The artifice of the images is highlighted, and emphasized by the playful commentary on artificial snow and artificial water. At this point the factual leaves off, and a scene is staged based on a previously filmed event. For this sequence to take place, the ‘real’ scene with Fabiola in New York would had to have been filmed first, then shown to Juliette who remakes Fabiola’s scene. The actual event and consequent documentary image of Juliette at the beach in Cuba is forced into being by a primary actual event filmed in New York. Film, a seemingly second-order reproductive vehicle, is seen here to reorder the actual events of the primary world. As with *Si me comprendieras*, the actuality that is filmed is based on a previous fiction. Fiction is the basis for facts. These factual fictions are doubled upon themselves, becoming ‘fictual fictions’. The confusions of fact and fiction, of who is filming and who is being filmed, are quite apparent here. But it is more than a simple crossing of subject and object. Bound up with that crossing is a particular set of sexual politics. When Juliette takes the camera, the shot of the boy’s crotch indicates two things: first, Juliette, as is clear throughout the film, is quite sexually open and frank; second, and combined with the final clip of Fabiola, we are shown the ways in which the one who holds the camera is the one in control, the one who owns the gaze and therefore has access to power and sex. Juliette, seemingly naturally, feels that power as soon as she picks up the camera, as if she did not need to be told this.

This back-and-forth between Fabiola and Juliette is then interspersed with footage of a third Latina who has broken into the North American media world, Salma Hayek. Actual clips from the film in which she

features, *El callejon de los milagros/Midaq Alley* (Jorge Fons, 1995), are shown, intercut with Juliette's commentary on them. In very clever, but very fictional edits, Hayek as 'Alma' in *Midaq Alley* is approached by a woman who asks, 'Alma, are you going to mass?' As Salma/Alma looks up, the film cuts to the counter-shot of the Hollywood sign, as if Hollywood were the sacred place at which one attended mass. In the real film, of course, this did not occur. Then, going further, we are shown another counter-shot of Juliette's face, responding to Salma as 'Alma' in the film. This is then cut with the real Hayek giving her own commentary on *Midaq Alley*.

In *Midaq Alley*, Hayek becomes a prostitute because she believes she can be a star someday and that this work will get her there. She believes a fiction, told to her by a man with power who controls the gaze. Things become uncomfortable as Juliette comments on Salma/Alma's stupidity for going along with the fiction. But as *Who the Hell is Juliette?* continues, it becomes clear that Alma's story is a mise-en-abyme of that of Juliette, who in real life is following a similar path, having prostituted herself for money to a few European tourists. She too has been exploited by other powers: male powers, North American and European powers.

Or is it that Juliette retains power by playing the fiction? Her survival is one of fiction, of an identity that is not easily pinned down – and we are shown many people saying differing things about her. The Euro-men, and the filmmaker, may be seen to be exploiting Juliette, but which Juliette is it that they are exploiting? She becomes objectified only if she remains singular, but to paraphrase a title from Luce Irigaray, Juliette's sex is not one. The taxidermy of documentary only works with a stable object. Haraway states that 'Taxidermy fulfils the fatal desire to represent, *to be whole*; it is a politics of reproduction'. Juliette, I suggest, survives, stays alive, by playing with identity, with fiction and fact to the point where they are no longer separable.

Then there is the Mexican director/editor/producer Marcovich, trying to pin down the Cuban Juliette. The ability to play the game of identity becomes the most real action available to those on the island. Juliette's play on this game is best exemplified near the end of the film when she is trying to say the word, *actuar* (to act) but she keeps slipping and saying 'actual'. Even as object of the camera's gaze, her speech dismantles the gaze of the cinematic apparatus.

Cuban filmmakers such as Díaz and Pérez approach their narration and filmmaking as constructed and contested work, and are unafraid to show the fictional nature of Cuban cultural reality. And the Mexican Marcovich is also willing to play with the fictions, but in his film it is the Cuban subjects/actors who most directly invert the fact and fiction relation, even as Marcovich plays along. Thus, in the case of *Juliette*, it is also an 'outsider' who is able to help create the fictual faction of Cuban culture. In contrast, Wenders, Bosch and Doménech (perhaps it is a coincidence that they are all European) seem to be forgetting that art and artifice pervade visual representations of culture, capitalizing on the bond

that is created between image and object, and legitimizing their filmic evidence as a source of knowledge for reality. In their pursuit of truth/facts, documentarians from outside Cuba often end up with a taxidermic view of the culture, fearing that it is fading away and hence it is their duty to salvage it. Cubans, by contrast, seem to gleefully say, 'We're here', but for those of us looking from the outside, we might not be able to pin down who 'they' are.

I have tried to make it clear that I am not claiming Cubans filming within the island are more 'accurate' about their culture, nor that they have more authority to represent themselves on screen, nor that outsiders are less capable of representing the reality that may escape them from the outside. This would be to fall into the essentialist trap that I am trying to dismantle. Rather, what I have argued here, in light of several contemporary documentaries with Cuban subject matter, is that the Cuban filmmakers, and even the 'actors' within the films, are often more aware of the artificial nature of cultural representation than are outsiders filming about the island. Facts and fictions work in dialectical tension with each other, and what has emerged in and through a Cuban documentary style is a 'fictional faction', in which initial facts are inverted into fictions, and these fictions ultimately are portrayed as 'facts'.

Channel 4 dossier

Introduction: thinking outside the box

PAUL KERR

In November 2007 the British Film Institute hosted a conference to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Channel 4 television in the UK. This dossier is not only occasioned by the conference and the anniversary it celebrated, but also seeks to reflect upon the parallel trajectories of television studies in the UK and of the channel. Indeed, several contributors to, and board members of, *Screen* itself have been programme-makers for the channel at one time or another, particularly its early days. Included in this dossier is a review of the conference by Hannah Andrews, one of the young demographic so eagerly courted by the channel but so often blamed for its alleged retreat from its remit, and from the conference a plenary paper by John Ellis on the channel's early years and innovations, and a revised paper on Channel 4's shifting attitude to multiculturalism by Sarita Malik.

The conference came at a critical time for the channel, at the end of a painful year in terms of programming, profits and a problematic remit. The year began for Channel 4 with accusations of racism levelled against its latest series of *Celebrity Big Brother*, continued with the cancellation of programming built around phone-in competitions after evidence came to light of viewers being urged to call on premium-rate lines long after winners had been selected, and included both a highly tendentious documentary about climate change and a very belatedly cancelled season of programmes about masturbation, a so-called 'wank week'; all this while appealing for a slice of the BBC licence fee to sustain its public service programming. Channel 4 had come a long way from its founding remit, whose key clauses, as laid down by the 1980 Broadcasting Act,

were summarized most recently by communications industry watchdog Ofcom as follows:

Channel Four is a public service broadcaster with a unique statutory remit to provide a broad range of high quality and diverse programming which, in particular: demonstrates innovation, experiment and creativity in the form and content of programmes; appeals to the tastes and interests of a culturally diverse society; makes significant contribution to meeting the need for the licensed public service channels to include programmes of an educational nature and other programmes of educative value; and exhibits a distinctive character.¹

The conference also came at a critical time for me, as I had just started a new career as a Senior Lecturer in Broadcast Media at London Metropolitan University. From 1985 until summer 2007 I had worked in television, often producing programmes about the audiovisual media for Channel 4 but no longer doing much writing or teaching about them. Indeed, the last major academic conference I had attended before this one on Channel 4 was the inaugural International Television Studies Conference (ITSC) in summer 1984. Returning to the field after a quarter-of-a-century's absence, in the year that Channel 4 celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary, I was struck at the conference by the dramatic changes, but also surprising similarities, to the academic culture I had left behind when I moved from my job at the BFI into television.

John Ellis modestly described himself at the conference as an amateur academic, while conference convenor Richard Paterson referred to him as an 'amphibian', someone who has successfully evolved to survive both as a television practitioner and a professor. Interestingly, Channel 4 series produced by 'amphibian' academics Mandy Merck and Ellis were among the subjects of papers given at the conference, while Ellis and fellow amphibian Rod Stoneman both gave keynote presentations: a revised version of Ellis's plenary is included here, while Stoneman has written about his own experiences at the channel in *Screen* before.² In an essay on the channel in *Screen* some twenty-five years ago, Ellis noted that 'Several people have asked about this rather abrupt transition between critical analysis of institutions and aesthetics to actually working for one of these institutions', concluding that the main difficulty of the transition was the shift from a secure job in academia to insecure employment in an independent production company.³ In 2008 the most abrupt transitions are, like my own, likely to be in precisely the opposite direction. For the time being, at least in conventional broadcast television, the kind of career opportunities that Channel 4 opened up for the likes of Stoneman, Ellis and me seem to have closed. Indeed, if the numbers of emigres from British broadcasting claiming asylum in education meets my expectation, then perhaps the balance between theory and practice in media studies in the UK is in for a radical realignment.

1 'Adjudication of Ofcom Content Sanctions Committee: Channel Four Television Corporation in respect of its service Channel 4', 24 May 2007, 1.8. URL: http://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv/obb/ocsc_adjud/channel4_cbb/ [accessed 21 June 2008].

2 Rod Stoneman, 'Sins of commission', *Screen*, vol. 33, no. 2 (1992), pp. 127–44.

3 John Ellis, 'Channel 4: Working notes', *Screen*, vol. 24, no. 6 (1983), p. 37.

- 4 Phillip Drummond and Richard Paterson (eds), *Television in Transition* (London: British Film Institute, 1986).

Until now, most such emigres have been recruited to teach media practice, so my own slightly schizophrenic career history seems somewhat unusual in straddling the theory–practice divide. To date, I have been teaching modules on ‘Media, Culture and Society’, ‘Media Audiences’ and ‘Documentary Production’. Whilst industry refugees who teach media practice may experience a technological lag between the equipment available to producers and broadcasters and that afforded to higher education, those teaching theory modules face quite another lack of synchronicity – between the ‘issues’ absorbing academics and those of concern to many television workers and indeed viewers in Britain today.

Attending the 2007 Channel 4 conference as a recent emigre to academia, it was reassuring to recognize some faces after my extended sabbatical from screen studies. I was nevertheless surprised to find so many academic approaches and agendas quite so familiar. Leafing through Phillip Drummond’s and Richard Paterson’s anthology of the papers from that first 1984 ITSC conference as I write this, I am struck by how little seems to have changed.⁴ Paterson, after all, was the convenor of the 2007 conference. At both conferences there were papers on multiculturalism and ethnic minority broadcasting, on fictions about television and television fiction, on history on television and the history of television, on ads, on news coverage, on talk. But, rather more significantly, on the basis of this event there seems to me to be a great deal that is not there any more; indeed, reading the Channel 4 conference symptomatically as a text, it could be characterized by its structuring absences. There was little or nothing, for instance, about politics or policy, about the channel’s economics, its projected public service funding gap or about the independent production sector that was spawned by Channel 4.

Instead the Channel 4 conference featured a News debate (around coverage of the Iraq war), a history on television debate, a ‘whatever happened to the single play?’ discussion, and panels about race and sex (but not, significantly, class). There were also three papers about branding and another about interstitial programming and continuity. As Hannah Andrews points out in her review of the conference, there was also a presiding sense of nostalgia throughout – from one-time Channel 4 commissioning editor Rod Stoneman’s presentation of the 1980s ‘greatest hits’ of the late Independent Film and Video department (a counter-cinema/avant-garde slot) to Michael Tracey’s paper about the imminent and, he suggested, inevitable demise of public service broadcasting.

This is not to say that there was not detailed research in many of the papers, including an analysis of the channel’s early contribution to media literacy (about *Open the Box* [1986] and *The Media Show* [1987–90] – the first two television series I worked on) and an overview of the channel’s recent History programming boom (the commissioning department behind my last documentary, transmitted in March 2007). I sometimes felt my previous professional life flashing before my eyes as I

listened to the presentations. If the first of these papers evoked melancholia for a television world we have lost, the latter reinforced my reluctant conviction that it was no longer possible to earn a living making the kinds of programmes I wanted to produce.

British television in general and Channel 4 in particular have changed almost beyond recognition in the last twenty-five years. The researcher on *Open the Box* (for which I was the archive researcher) was Jane Root, who went on to become a major British television producer, co-running Wall to Wall TV (maker of *The Media Show*, *Who Do You Think You Are* – now being piloted for the US networks – *1900 House* and its internationally coproduced sequels, and the long-running drama series *New Tricks*) before becoming Controller of BBC2 and then, until very recently, president of the Discovery Networks in the USA. As such, Root's career would have made a valuable addition to Julia Hallam's conference paper on 'The effect of Channel 4 on female career paths in television'. Root's tie-in publication, *Open the Box*, was in some ways a characteristic popular media studies book of the mid 1980s – arguing, among other things, that just because television was popular it was not necessarily bad.⁵ And, thus, that just because mass audiences enjoy something they are not necessarily dupes. But this argument has developed over the last two decades to the point where not only many Channel 4 suppliers but also some academics seem to believe that just because something is popular it *must* be good. Certainly that argument, once literally unspeakable in Channel 4 circles, is now the currency of the channel.

An intellectual and temporal lag between television and television studies seems to operate in both directions. As a practitioner, I soon ceased to be aware of the work being done in academia until media studies debates surfaced in the pages of the quality press. As a neophyte academic, I was struck by how comparatively little work seemed to pay attention to the pressing policy and other issues concerning Channel 4. At the conference, the focus, as Andrews points out, was very largely on the early years of the channel. As a television producer, I learned the hard way that the glib rhetorical statements I had once made in print – about drama documentary, literary adaptation and 'quality' television, for instance – seemed virtually irresponsible in the face of the professional realities of working in the medium. Perhaps my own reassessment of intellectual priorities as a recent emigre from television has influenced my sense of the relative urgency and applicability of the academic work with which I am endeavouring rapidly to (re)acquaint myself.

For instance, in one of my first articles for *Screen* I argued that the uncertainty of the truth status of drama documentary was a good thing since it would 'involve increasing the audience's scepticism about the other representations which television offers'.⁶ After a year in which the audience's trust in television as a reliable 'documentary' source has been seriously undermined by corrupt practices encouraged by increasing commercialization, this seems blithely irresponsible. To take one recent

5 Jane Root, *Open the Box* (London: Comedia, 1986).

6 Paul Kerr, 'A response to John Caughie', *Screen*, vol. 22, no. 1 (1981), p. 104.

- 7 Paul Kerr 'Classic serials: to be continued', *Screen*, vol. 23, no. 1 (1982), pp. 6–19.

- 8 Jane Feuer, Paul Kerr and Tise Vahimagi (eds), *MTM: Quality Television* (London: British Film Institute, 1984).

example from my own career, in 2006 I proposed and was commissioned to make a documentary drama about Samuel Johnson and the writing of the *English Dictionary*. The proposal stipulated that all dramatized sequences would be constructed entirely from words written by, or otherwise attributed to, Johnson himself. When the BBC executive saw the rough cut, she not only told us to abandon the (alphabetical) structure as it would be too difficult for the audience, but instructed us to invent dialogue if what Johnson himself had said about the compilation process was not 'dramatic' enough. This did not seem to me to lead to a usefully sceptical view of the truth status of television, but simply to reveal contempt for both the potential of the medium and the intelligence of the audience. My previous drama-documentary, about Mary Seacole for Channel 4 in 2005, had met with far stricter requirements from the commissioning editor about the signposting of sources of testimony. Evidence, if it is needed, of the impact of human agency on such policies.

If my work in Documentary Arts and History television (now within the institutional embrace of Specialist Factual) can be usefully classified, it would probably fall into the category of 'quality television'. Significantly, writing about this category in *Screen* before working in the medium, my response was extremely critical, part of a polemic against a literary aesthetic dominating British television drama.⁷ In that essay I ignored the wide range of prestige and heritage drama (and other genres) then prevalent in British television – a range that seems barely conceivable today, when the assault on elitism, which includes that of theatre or literature on television, has all but eliminated such ambition from our screens. The recent critical celebration of *Cranford* (BBC1, 2007), an adaptation of the books by Elizabeth Gaskell, is simply a symptom of just how rare and reduced in range this once familiar television genre has become.

At the other end of the 'quality' spectrum was the US series *Hill Street Blues*. *Hill Street Blues* – and its US production company, MTM Enterprises – was, in a sense, my entree into a career in television. In 1984 I coedited and cowrote a book about MTM, and then researched a documentary about it for Channel 4 and scheduled an evening of MTM programmes on the channel to complement it.⁸ I was interested in how demographics influenced the political economy of US television advertising and also of programme making and network scheduling. At the same time, I wanted to examine how an independent production company capitalized on this and to ask whether the programmes that resulted were better or worse as a result. Among the weaknesses of that book was the failure to elaborate our evaluative criteria. This may begin to explain why the ambition to influence the debate about 'quality' in the UK did not have the impact on either writing about television or programme-making and commissioning themselves that we might have hoped. Whereas, in the USA, so called 'quality' demographics proved an incentive for a 'quality' aesthetic strategy for the NBC network and more recently for subscription companies, notably HBO, in the UK they are

perceived as distinctly negative for public service channels, which, in the case of the BBC, have no airtime to sell and a universal licence fee to defend. Meanwhile, Channel 4 has made the strategic financial and editorial decision of prioritizing younger viewers over those more affluent, better-educated, but sometimes older.

Ellis suggested at the conference that Channel 4 helped to create the preconditions for contemporary broadcasting, but in the process destroyed the justification for its own existence. This is true, but it is also the case that Channel 4 was created to offer an alternative in a broadcasting ecology in which, as Ellis also pointed out, the principle of universality of access was ubiquitous: ‘everybody must be able to understand everything’ was the watchword of the three channels in 1982. One of the characteristics of the programming world that Channel 4 has helped to bring about is that once again this is true of all television today, terrestrial and digital. It remains unclear whether there is any immediate prospect of a new technological or institutional escape hatch from this universality. But Channel 4 did something else: it shook up the language of (and on) television, breaking up the conventional ‘form and content’ of programming by insisting that everybody no longer needed to be able to understand (or feel comfortable watching) everything on television.

In her essay ‘What is the “television” of Television Studies?’, Charlotte Brunsdon notes that ‘In contrast to the television of the social sciences, this television was very “textualised”. The concentration was on programmes and genres rather than industry and economy.’⁹ On the evidence of the Channel 4 conference, this concentration remains striking and Brunsdon’s call for a reemphasis on ‘the production of texts, as opposed to their productivity’ seems to have gone largely unheard.¹⁰ Malik’s paper, a revised version of which is in this dossier, and Georgie Born’s final plenary at the conference, were rare exceptions which contextualized their analyses of the channel’s programming through discussion of developments in policy, economics and politics.

Part of this dissatisfaction is simply autobiographical. I now teach media studies in a department of applied social sciences at LMU, so the television I teach is ‘a television of the social sciences’. Indeed, I find myself running, among other things, undergraduate and postgraduate modules on media audiences referring to mass communications research, some of which was already beginning to seem anachronistic twenty years ago. Ten years ago Jostein Gripsrud wrote that the original interest in policy and production in the cultural studies of television had all but disappeared, while textual analysis and the study of media audiences still flourished.¹¹ Gripsrud’s interest was in media policy and, while wanting to rethink public service broadcasting, he was disappointed to discover a kind of cultural relativism in the work of some influential media audience researchers. A decade after Gripsrud’s article appeared, the evidence for his concern over the priorities of much television study remains persuasive and, to this ex-practitioner, perplexing. As a newly elected member of the MeCCSA executive, I was therefore pleased to see the

9 Charlotte Brunsdon, ‘What is the “television” of Television Studies?’, in Christine Geraghty and David Lusted (eds), *The Television Studies Book* (London: Arnold, 2002).

10 Ibid., p. 110.

11 Jostein Gripsrud, ‘Cultural Studies and intervention in television policy’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1998), p. 88.

creation of a new grouping for those members interested in matters of media policy.

One of the consequences of the institutionalization of Media Studies as a discipline has been that academic work in the area, like programme-making at Channel 4, has been 'professionalized'. Indeed, just as public service broadcasting in the UK and Channel 4 in particular has been subject to the market, so too has academia with many of the same concerns about casualization, commercialization, targets, ratings, metrics, 'dumbing down', and so on. Nevertheless, the residual unreconstructed public service programme-maker in me wants to ask whether soap scholars doing audience research or textual analysis ever wonder if increasing the number of weekly episodes of soaps hastened single dramas and original serials on their way to extinction? Similarly, do analysts of reality TV formats ever ask what impact the ubiquity of such programmes has had on the traditional documentary forms that are being killed off to pay/make room for them? This is not to argue against textual analysis, but to urge textual analysts not to forget the place of those texts in the history and political economy of broadcasting.

Cultural and media studies in the 1970s and 1980s considered itself a kind of political intervention. That kind of ambition (self-deception?) seems no longer possible today. Stoneman has written eloquently in *Screen* about the ways in which the envelope-busting ambitions of television radicals were gradually eroded: 'Whatever the identity people initially bring to television, the work and its context eventually have an effect: gradual implicit institutional repositioning'.¹² Much the same could be said of academia, in which the initial media/television studies passion and polemic swiftly found themselves being similarly professionalized. Just as it is possible to anatomize 'the effect of the magnetic forces that pulled independent film practices towards dominant modes of representation',¹³ so too the curricula and modules of media studies seem to have undergone comparable normalization. Writing about the development of studies in visual culture, Griselda Pollock has described this process well:

This ragbag of informal self-education and emergent interdisciplinary formations decamping from English, sociology or philosophy to reconfigure into novel and daring marginal spaces in new universities and polytechnics served as a zone of experimentation. . . . The informality of such novel formations rapidly gives way to a necessary formalization to meet the requirements of the institution in which alone its practitioners can survive. They need jobs and some framework for teaching and researching. Once what was being created becomes a practice to which a newer generation can attach themselves directly, the formative axis of dissidence and displacement, of disciplinary formation and interdisciplinary critique no longer operates and the latter's originary openness turns into a more formalized 'discipline' by default. It is inherited by those who only know its inside.¹⁴

¹² Stoneman, 'Sins of commission', p. 139.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Griselda Pollock, 'Visual culture and its discontents: joining in the debate', *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2003), p. 254.

This analysis, as apt for media studies as it is for Channel 4, goes some way to explaining the alienated melancholia of an older generation and the incomprehension of a younger demographic at the recent conference. Brunsdon has characterized the 1970s as the emergent period of television studies, and this, of course, was the decade in which Channel 4 was conceived, starting with the 1977 Annan Report and culminating in the 1980 Broadcasting Act. It is perhaps worth remembering that Michael Jackson, series producer of *Open the Box* and first series editor of *The Media Show*, who went on to become Controller of both BBC1 and BBC2, chief executive of Channel 4, president and chief executive of USA Entertainment, chairman of the Universal Television Group in the USA and who is now president of programming at Barry Diller's IAC, InterActiveCorp, was a media studies graduate. The channel and the discipline seem to have 'grown up' and become pragmatic, in parallel. In a sense, some of the 'children' of Channel 4 are still running the Anglo-US digital media.

The media historian and intellectual godfather of Channel 4, Anthony Smith, has argued that the channel is now run by people who do not understand its purpose. But then it is also watched by people with a similar ignorance, and some of that is quite simply demographic – they were born too late to witness the channel's stumbling but well-meaning first steps. Maggie Brown's recent book about the channel, *A Licence to Be Different*, includes an interview with Angus McQueen, a multiple award-winning documentary director, then newly appointed as the channel's Head of Documentaries. Interviewed in April 2007, he told her:

I think Channel 4 has become very conservative. I watched all its output in September, before I joined, and it was like my old aunt giving me advice: how to live, eat, clean the house, bring up the kids, talk to my husband – middle-class norms, conservative with a small c. We have lost the multicultural, multidimensional impulse.¹⁵

Malik's essay on the mainstreaming of minorities by Channel 4's shifting policy on multiculturalism powerfully reinforces his point. As I drafted this introduction, in late January 2008, McQueen had just announced his resignation from the channel. Television documentaries, specifically those that are innovative in form and content, and which address audiences essentially unserved by mainstream television, are worth defending, now more than ever. Ellis's essay sketches out how a channel, which set out with such radical ambitions, mutated into something so unrecognizable whilst paving the way for the television we now have. He identifies the era in which it was created and the 'identity politics' which supported its emergence. And Andrews's review of the BFI conference reveals how and why a new generation of viewers (and academics) sees the channel with very different expectations and responds in very different ways from those of us who were around to watch – and even provide programmes for – its radical first decade.

¹⁵ Maggie Brown, *A Licence to be Different: the Story of Channel 4* (London: British Film Institute, 2007).

A view from the demographic: notes on a conference

HANNAH ANDREWS

This report responds to the BFI/Channel 4 – The First 25 Years Conference, of 17–18 November 2007. Any conference report will naturally be informed by which combination of panels are attended and by the agenda of the reporter. I quickly found that my perspective on Channel 4 was quite different from that of the majority of speakers, for the simple reason that I am two years younger than the channel and thus my experience of broadcasting in Britain has been influenced by those changes wrought by the channel which were the primary focus of the conference. Comments made in the opening plenary about the televisual and broadcasting environment prior to the channel's inception, which drew nods of recognition and amusement from many of the listeners, I could only understand second-hand, with no recourse to personal memory. This experience, especially in light of the fact that much of the focus during the conference was on earlier, rather than more recent, Channel 4, was to be often repeated. Furthermore, my first-hand experience of Channel 4 has been after that crucial moment in 1993 when the channel began selling its own advertising, and thus my conception of what is meant by 'Channel 4' may have been somewhat different from that of many other conference attendees, particularly those who had been personally involved in the first decade. With this in mind, my response falls somewhere between a report and a reflective meditation on the tone and themes of the conference, and is written from my position as a member of a very particular demographic.

The conference opened with the plenary by John Ellis (Royal Holloway, University of London), also published in this dossier. His answer to the titular question 'What did Channel 4 do for us?' was that

the channel, for all its innovation and experiment, ‘worked itself out of a job’ by permanently altering the face of British broadcasting and gradually lost its earlier energy and determination to be different. This was to reflect the prevailing sentiment of the conference, a mixture of nostalgic admiration for the channel’s first decade and gloomy disappointment with its subsequent output. This was explored and dissected but generally upheld by a large number of the speakers, notably Michael Tracey (University of Boulder) and Rod Stoneman (University of Galway) in the closing plenary of the first day. It is perfectly understandable, however, that this attitude should emanate from those who, like Ellis and Stoneman, were intimately involved in the early Channel 4 and thus have something of a personal investment in its legacy. The primary focus of Ellis’s paper was not this legacy but the initial differences between the previous broadcast environment and the early achievements of Channel 4. The examples used to demonstrate this, *The Friday Alternative* (1982–83) and *Whatever You Want* (1982–83), served the dual purpose of highlighting the experimental and sometimes amateur quality of the programming, as well as the influence it would have on the more general broadcast environment. With no direct experience to enable a comparison to previous broadcasting, my own memories serve to corroborate Ellis’s main point, that the experiments would be taken on board and refined over time. *Whatever You Want*, for example, was to me reminiscent of current post-pub entertainment shows and 1990s children’s Saturday morning magazine programmes. This plenary effectively set the agenda of the conference by reminding us of the historical moment of the channel’s inception, and made it clear that for those involved it was an exciting but uncertain time, full of ambitious promises that subsequent circumstances made it difficult to keep.

A dominant theme of the conference was the changing image of Channel 4. Foregrounded in the opening plenary by Ellis’s contention that the channel challenged not only broadcasting’s content potential but the graphic and aesthetic capabilities of television, branding and ephemeral material would be the subject of papers by Paul Grainge (University of Nottingham), Christine Fanthome (Boston University), Steve Bryant (BFI) and Catherine Johnson (Royal Holloway, University of London). All four of these papers were nominally on identity, yet largely revolved around the conflation of identity with image in discourse around Channel 4.

Fanthome’s paper investigated the changes in the channel’s ident, from ‘Blocks’, the symbol of the first decade and its vision of adhesive diversity, to the current ‘Atlas’, where the figure 4 is hidden in a digitally created landscape, arguing that the ident reflects changes in the channel itself and the manner in which it addresses potential audiences. Grainge examined the branding of the channel in conjunction with US ‘event’ television series *Lost* (2004–), arguing that this programme was promoted via an invented relationship with other ‘quality’ (HBO) imports, the promotion in turn creating an impression of Channel 4 as the

natural home of this kind of programming. Bryant introduced a different approach to viewing which involved handling four entire days' worth of channel output from four different years. Though arguably as artificial as any other manner of viewing for academic purposes, it takes into account a broader view of channel address. He argued that this kind of viewing gives greater insight into the channel's identity than schedule-checking or watching programmes separately, and urged those present to utilize the resources at the BFI to follow this example. Though one might question, as Bryant did, the intrinsic value and economy of this kind of vast work, the attention drawn to television ephemera in all three papers raises a methodological challenge for the future, to take seriously all aspects of a channel's address.

Johnson's plenary was more of a negotiation between history and concept than the other papers on branding, which were rather descriptive. It had two interlinked concerns: Channel 4's three-pronged response to the evolving media environment (niche targeting, commercial expansion, forming a corporate rather than publisher-broadcaster setup) and the manner in which it marketed this response, the latter reflecting, but also an integral part of, the former. She used branding theory to demonstrate how Channel 4 attempted in the early years of commercial expansion to differentiate itself as a product. Johnson highlighted the crucial paradox that the channel's programmes are expected to reflect the brand, yet, as an aggregator not a producer of programmes, the relationship with its programming is more complex and less direct. Like Grainge, she argued that the promotion of 'quality' US imports reflects this. Her argument concluded by suggesting that the success of this period of brand development was epitomized by an interlocking of public service and commercial pressures. She also suggested that the digital switchover in 2012 will mark a further new era for the channel in which it will be unable, without alternative means of funding to commercials, to continue its public service work.

The panel on 'Channel 4 Cultures' displayed a less thematically united set of papers. Susana Zilic Fiser (University of Maribor) discussed the potential for Channel 4 to be used as a model for other European commercial PSB channels, tentatively concluding that, as the result of culturally and politically specific circumstances, a similar model would be unlikely to succeed in the present media climate. Fiser's ability to employ a distanced objectivity through lack of first-hand exposure to the channel provided a contrast to those whose papers were given from a closer perspective. Julia Hallam's (University of Liverpool) paper on female career paths provided by the new production context in the independent sector prompted lively audience debate, reminding delegates of the level of passion of many of the early personnel, a contingent well represented at the conference. The voluble presence of so many former associates served to highlight the conspicuous absence of any current Channel 4 staff. Heather Nunn's and Anita Biressi's (Roehampton University) paper was the first to engage with the more

1 Maggie Brown, *A Licence to be Different: the Story of Channel 4* (London: British Film Institute, 2007).

recent television phenomenon of reality programmes, discussing the role of class politics and the 'bad citizen' and the symbolic rehabilitation that occurs in shows such as *How Clean is Your House?* (2003-) and *Wife Swap* (2003-). It was also the first outing for the spectre of *Big Brother* (2000-), which would loom large over the conference, with particular reference to the crisis point indicated in Maggie Smith's recent history of the controversial *Celebrity Big Brother* (2001–07) race row.¹

Angshukanta Chakroborty (University of East London) and Sarita Malik (Brunel University), as well as Biressi and Nunn, reflected on the impact of this moment. This panel revolved around multiculturalism, and used the *Big Brother* race row to reflect the changing relations between Channel 4 and ethnic minorities. Malik's paper, included in this dossier, described the movement after 1993 from commitments to specific minorities in order to incorporate them into the mainstream, marking the closure of the Multicultural Programmes Department in 2003 as the formal end of these commitments. She argued that decisions like this have seriously damaged the public service claims of the channel, and that the race row, and Channel 4 chief executive Andy Duncan's now famous statement about the confusion over whether to consider ratings or people, is a stark reflection of this. Chakroborty focused on material produced for Channel 4 films by British South Asians and the consequences for representation, and similarly questioned whether, in the aftermath of the *Big Brother* race row, these need to be reinvestigated. The third paper in this panel dealt similarly with the history of Channel 4's service of the Irish minority through an investigation of a single programme *The Irish Angle* (1983–87). All three papers charted the negotiation of the remit in relation to access, address and representation for minority cultures as part of the channel's ongoing public service requirements, suggesting that the requirement of service to particular audiences, and its success or failure, is best exemplified in approaches to ethnic minorities, whose increasing marginalization is reflected in ghettoized scheduling and eventual integration into the mainstream.

Adam Ganz (Royal Holloway, University of London) also used the example of *Big Brother*, but to demonstrate quite a different point, in a panel on 'Drama and Comedy', claiming that former requirements of drama on Channel 4 – innovation, invention, improvisation and irreproducibility – have shifted onto reality television formats. He argued that since relations between channel and producer have altered, with the latter constricted and controlled during development in an increasingly centralized commissioning process, drama work has become increasingly formulaic. This formula – programmes about minorities who 'like sex and drugs and having a laugh and don't really see themselves as minorities' – is reflected in *Queer as Folk* (1999–2000), *Teachers* (2001–04), *No Angels* (2004–07) and Channel 4's most successful drama of recent years *Shameless* (2004-), and has weakened the imperative for genuine dramatic conflict.

Lez Cooke's (Manchester Metropolitan University) paper was an absorbing study of drama from 1982–91, in which he created an eight-point taxonomy of the kinds of drama programmes broadcast during this period. He noted the technological and scheduling peculiarities that would blur the already tenuous line between television drama and film, and argued that the ratings imperative after 1991 would erode the remit in relation to drama, with the eventual consequence of a dearth of originality and quality. This argument mirrors those from numerous other papers marking the 1991 Broadcasting Act as the first dramatic crisis point in the channel's history. A younger attendee asked during the question section whether perhaps this kind of drama can no longer be broadcast because, since the media landscape has altered, it is no longer 'television', a concept largely dismissed by the panel. This exemplified the tension between those who remember fondly and regretfully the early experiments of the channel, and those who, because they cannot, have a more contemporary sensibility.

Phil Wickham's (BFI) paper on Channel 4's approach to and influence over comedy had a much more recent subject matter than most of the papers I heard. He argued that comedy was not an early priority of Channel 4; all that was required of it by Jeremy Isaacs was that it was different, and thus there was little room for traditional formulae. Wickham argued that, in terms of comedy and entertainment programming, as Channel 4 chose to concentrate its efforts on a younger audience, it viewed them as more open to innovation and experiment in comedy, as well as having a broader view of comedic content. He used a case study, *Peep Show* (2003–08), which draws upon several sitcom conventions within an untested and innovative first-person point-of-view structure to demonstrate one of the recent successful experiments in this area. This view struck me as having crucial conceptual implications, for it presents a paradoxical question: how can an address to an audience that is more suited to consuming the type of programming (innovative and experimental) explicitly required by the remit be so fundamentally damaging? Though this might be limited to specific genres, such as comedy and drama, it is important to acknowledge that innovation and experiment might be considered, to a certain extent, the domain of the young. Many of those involved in Channel 4 in its formative years, both in commissioning and production, were, in comparison to their contemporaries on other channels, conspicuously young, a factor which contributed to its early reputation as an upstart brat in the broadcasting environment. This seems to be the same generation of personnel who evaluate the channel comparatively negatively today.

A comparison between the closing plenaries on the first and second days of the conference reveals two contradictory approaches to the future of the channel: apocalyptic pessimism and positive modification. Stoneman's paper on the channel's early radicalism was a clear reflection of the nostalgic regret recurring throughout the first day that the channel is no longer what it once was. Tracey, looking forward, was deeply

unconvinced that public service broadcasting *per se* has much of a future, describing it as a conflict between market forces and democracy's larger ambitions. He questioned whether historical reality would allow the ambitions of Ofcom for Channel 4 – that it provide plurality and competition for the BBC – to come to fruition, and whether 'shocking' television would be enough to fulfil this purpose. Though his basic question was 'is public service on the right side of history?', one got the distinct sense that he began his paper believing the answer to be inevitably and irrevocably 'no'. This plenary displayed both melancholic nostalgia and despair for the future.

Georgina Born's (University of Cambridge) paper was far more generous towards Channel 4 than most of the rest of the conference papers, and presented a more optimistic vision for the future. This manifested itself largely in the recognition that the channel evolved rather than sold out its public service demands, and the suggestion that further evolution was necessary for the maintenance of a public service role in the future. She explored Ofcom's recent inquiries into public service, arguing that they reduce public service to countable genres (documentary, current affairs, news and so on) that commercial broadcasters may be unable to sustain. She rejected the recent notion of an 'arts council of the airwaves' as it might undermine the long tradition of autonomy which Channel 4 has been able to maintain through its unique commissioning system.

A more positive evaluation of recent Channel 4 was offered by her contention that efforts had been made, even during the period of corporatization and commercialism, to maintain the public service commitment on the main channel, whilst expanding on other digital channels, utilizing cross-subsidy to do so. She used this example to counter the unhelpful existing assumption that the demise of public service is inevitable in a fully commercial multi-channel mediascape. On presenting a list of potential problems for the public service future of the channel, she also suggested their solutions, advocating public subsidy as an incentive for the channel to renew its commitment, as it has recently pledged to do, to its remit. She ended by suggesting that is needed in the future of a mediated democracy is diversity-within-universality, and that interventions need creatively to emphasize communicative democracy *only* under the imperative of public interest.

An examination of the major themes of the conference reveals that much of the negativity directed towards the channel springs from a clear project of dividing the channel's history in half. The conference's focus of attention on the earlier history of the channel reflects an idealization of early Channel 4 and a demonization of post-1993 output. Before 1993, it seems, the channel was unruly, iconoclastic and innovatory, but after this point, when the channel directed itself at a recognizable group of young affluent people rather than at multiple and divergent segments of society, it lost its energy and ability to challenge the mainstream. As a member of the demographic and a post-1993 viewer, I felt myself the object of

covert criticism for being the catalyst for this disastrous change in the channel. I found myself, as a member of the implicitly maligned demographic, quite unexpectedly taking a dually defensive position, on behalf of both the channel and of my peers. There appeared to be a general mistrust of the sixteen-to-thirty-four year-olds of the channel's address. The implication of this negative evaluation of post-1993 Channel 4 output seems to be that an appeal to youth necessarily makes for bad television. One main criticism levelled at the channel, along with its decision to focus its efforts on this demographic, was selling out of its public service commitment. I would argue that an address to youth is perfectly valid in terms of the channel's remit, since it is a definable 'minority' as well as a large umbrella under which smaller minorities may be served. Furthermore, a younger audience tends to be more responsive to the kind of innovative programming that is expected of the channel, particularly in its drama, comedy and entertainment strands. It is difficult to imagine *Brass Eye* (1997), *Peep Show*, *Ali G* (2000) or *Skins* (2007-) on another channel, yet their cultural impact on young people has been enormous. Even the demonized *Big Brother* has consistently proved provocative, pushing the boundaries of what is and is not acceptable on television in a way that is only possible on a channel such as this.

One of the paradoxes of Channel 4's short life that the conference brought into sharp focus is the way in which popularity and high audience figures, the usual criteria for broadcasting success, have produced an ambiguous response. Appealing to the mainstream leaves the channel vulnerable to the accusation of selling out; of not fulfilling its remit's requirement to serve minorities. This does not take into account the common trajectory in popular culture – crossover from minority or underground to mainstream popularity – nor does it accept the real possibility that minority programming may isolate and alienate rather than incorporate those whom it is designed to serve. A further level of criticism is that in appealing to wider audiences, the channel is no longer experimental enough. Whilst the output of the channel no longer has the overt radicalism that was made possible by the unique funding structure of the first decade, it is still wont to experiment with new ideas and provide a platform for new talents. The necessity of attracting larger audiences, I feel, has been offset by consistent efforts to preempt, rather than follow, television trends. According to Ellis's plenary this has both positive and negative connotations, as the more successful Channel 4's experiments have been, the less they appear to fulfil what is required of them by the remit. Accusing Channel 4 of recent failure to achieve its goals seems rather unfair when the goalposts have been moved radically inward by its own success.

What did Channel 4 do for us? Reassessing the early years

JOHN ELLIS

It is difficult now even to conceive of the broadcasting environment in which Channel 4 was created. This is itself a mark of the channel's success. It was created in 1982 to challenge the then prevalent beliefs about impartiality, balance and universality of address in broadcasting. It did so through a guerrilla war with the regulatory body ITC, which had the right to vet programmes before transmission. Channel 4 won this war and enabled broadcasting in Britain to develop a greater degree of diversity and risk-taking. In doing so, Channel 4 worked itself out of a job, and it has since struggled to find a role that matches its initial impetus. This is especially so as many of the processes set in train in 1982 did not quite work out the way many pioneers had hoped.

Channel 4 was the result of a specific confluence of interests in a time of fundamental change in British society. The left, and even some of the centre, of British politics had profoundly lost their way. The 1970s had been characterized by a series of national-level conflicts between unions, management and government. Successive Labour governments had failed to produce a new social democratic settlement between organized labour and employers. Trade unions had increased their power but seemed unable to use it in constructive ways, preferring instead to promote purely sectional interests. A corporatist solution to the conflict between unions and management was widely canvassed, using the then success of the German model as an example that crucially involved an element of worker management of enterprises. However, it proved impossible to engineer such a solution and James Callaghan's Labour government fell in 1979 after a series of bitter public-sector strikes which the Conservative opposition dubbed 'the winter of discontent'.

Margaret Thatcher's election victory had brought a new market-oriented Conservative Party to power with the aim of curbing the power of the unions. This government remained uncertain in its ideological stance until its success in the Falklands Conflict in June 1982 (just before Channel 4's launch). Before this turning point, Thatcher was by no means in control of her party, having to conciliate various factions. Immediately after its election victory, the Thatcher government presided over a deep recession which was the result of its monetarist attempts to reduce inflation from its unsustainable 1979 annual level of 27%. This recession can now be seen as part of a particularly brutal process of restructuring the British economy. At the time, however, it was causing deep unease even with the Conservative Party as it was bankrupting efficient exporting companies as well as those that had problems. The recession was deeper than was either expected or needed, and Thatcher's very future as Prime Minister was in doubt until the Falklands victory.

The moment that led up to the launch of Channel 4 was one of deep uncertainty and anxiety. Three million people were unemployed as a result of the recession and its devastation of industry (the Labour Party estimated that it was more like four million). Sporadic riots broke out between the black community and police in several cities following the two days of unrest in Brixton in April 1981. Later in 1981, the Greenham Common women's peace camp was established, protesting at the locating of a new generation of US nuclear missiles in the UK, aimed at the traditional Cold War enemy of the USSR. The general feeling of anxiety was intensified by the increase of IRA bombing activity on the UK mainland. In July 1982, two IRA bomb attacks on soldiers in London's royal parks killed eleven people and wounded fifty. Later, in October 1984, a bomb was detonated at the Conservative Party conference hotel in Brighton, and Thatcher narrowly escaped death. The public mood at Channel 4's launch, therefore, was anything but upbeat.

The forces that had brought Channel 4 into existence, however, belonged to a slightly earlier and more optimistic period of British politics and social development. The weakness of the right wing in the early days of the Thatcher government allowed these forces to complete their work of creating a new kind of television under the patrician sponsorship of the Home Secretary William Whitelaw. The impetus came from a liberal/left consensus, powered by a substantial feeling of frustration among existing programme-makers. Many within BBC and ITV felt unable to make the kinds of programmes they wanted to because of the existing constraints of balance, objectivity and universality of address. Alongside them was a powerful industrial lobby which sought to expand the range of television channels from the existing three (BBC1, BBC2 and ITV), because there was clearly a demand for more television and for more advertising space on television. The resulting compromise between the two forces was Channel 4, an adventurous channel that financed itself from advertising, albeit with the financial underwriting of ITV for its initial years.

The people around Channel 4, from would-be programme-makers to political policymakers, intended this new channel to be a challenge to the existing broadcasting duopoly. It was to source its programmes (or at least half of them) from a new breed of producers working as independents. This would challenge the vertically-integrated structure of BBC and ITV. The various groups involved in formulating the new channel hoped that its programming would address some of the issues of social divergence that were seen to be opening up in British society. Channel 4 was based on the idea that significant minorities existed in society who were not well served by the existing broadcasting set-up. The idea of 'minorities' was a convenient rhetoric, able to unite two divergent sets of beliefs about the development of British society. One held that immigration and other social developments had produced a society that was far more heterogeneous than that of the 1950s, and that relatively cohesive minority groups had emerged that were in danger of being marginalized. The other belief was more economic. It held that consumer society was developing away from mass-market practices towards ever greater segmentation and diversity of tastes. In addition, the programme-makers were interested in a channel that would be shocking and outrageous, offering opinionated and experimental programming. Indeed, the idea of 'experiment and innovation in the form and content of programmes' was written into the Broadcasting Act 1980 that enabled Channel 4.

The television environment, and indeed the wider communications environment, was very different from that of Channel 4's twenty-fifth anniversary in 2007. Mobile telephones were not widely available and the supply of fixed landlines from the monopoly supplier British Telecom was restricted. Independent production companies setting up in London's Soho district during 1982 were quoted a waiting time of three months for a phone line. The fax machine, now an outdated technology, was yet to appear, so the streets (and pavements) of London were full of motorcycle document couriers. International communication still took place through the telex network, which remained the case through into the 1990s when dealing with companies in Africa. The small-business PC was still in the future, arriving in the mid 1980s at a cost of around £8000.

Television production technology was still resolutely analogue. Graphics were just that: drawn or printed pictures that were put under a caption camera. Online edit suites would provide a caption generator with a series of typefaces and the ability to provide various forms of crawling or rolling lines of type for end titles. Mixers developed from those used in live broadcasting were able to combine images in a number of divided screen or overlap designs. The ability to spin pictures in three dimensions was the startling innovation of the mid 1980s. The creation of complex video effects, though possible, was limited by two factors: the time it took, and the problem of tape generations. In the analogue environment, any editing meant copying of information from one tape to

another, and any process of copying brought with it a subtle degradation of image quality. After three generations of copying, this degradation began to be noticeable on the screen.

Broadcast standard videotape in 1982 was still the one-inch helical scan format. It was called 'one inch' because the tape was one inch wide. It came wound onto an open reel as it was too heavy for a cassette format. A one-hour tape in its plastic case was only just light enough to carry around. Location shooting with one inch was possible but involved a tape operator as well as a cameraperson as cameras and recorders were separate machines. This was not a format for hand-held work. Editing meant playing out the selected material from one of these one-inch reels of tape to copy it onto the master tape. The edit control computer could provide an accuracy of within about four frames. Most edit suites had three machines for playing in footage, but the real restriction lay in what a change of tape required: spooling back the old tape, threading in the new one and checking its colour balance, every single time. This continued until the arrival of the Betacam cassette system; otherwise the sub-broadcast Hi-Band U-Matic system could be used by special negotiation with the broadcast engineers of the television channel. Preparation for online editing was still a matter of choosing shots from VHS on paper, as VHS offline edit systems had not quite arrived. Offline U-Matic editing was the only alternative, and it was both costly and slow. It is hardly surprising, then, that the early Channel 4 programmes tended to be made on film or using multi-camera OB systems. In all, the prevailing technologies favoured a leisurely rate of editing and a simple visual style. It was particularly difficult to edit sound outside a film-based environment. All of this combined to make programmes that seem rather less than incisive now, and even at the time some seemed quite pedestrian and serious.

The television environment using this technology was also different. This was still the age of scarcity, with the production and broadcast of programmes controlled by a professional elite working within vertically integrated and regulated companies. In 1982, the UK still had no breakfast television of any description (this came in 1983); daytime schedules were dominated by television for schools; and television closed down habitually before midnight in order to avoid huge payments to broadcast technicians. There was no satellite or cable television, simply three terrestrial channels. Even domestic VHS recording was still a novelty for many as it was just shedding its image as a technology for hopeless television addicts (for which read 'feckless working class'). The broadcasting values of this age of scarcity were those of universality. Programmes should be intelligible for each and every viewer, even if they were not particularly interested. All the output of the three channels was vetted in advance to ensure that it did not offend against the prevailing regulations. The BBC undertook its own vetting through internal editorial processes. ITV was regulated by the Independent Broadcasting Authority, which had the right to demand to see

programmes before transmission, and to order that they not be broadcast if it judged them in breach of the regulations. Channel 4 was to be regulated by the IBA as well. Canny managers within ITV would alert the IBA to possible problems with programmes and would sometimes bring IBA representatives into the cutting rooms to ensure that programmes were acceptable. For Channel 4, this would be less of an option. The regulations concerned both the possibility of offence (taste and decency), and objectivity. Programmes had to be balanced in their coverage of issues, and to be particularly objective in relation to political matters. It was becoming increasingly difficult for broadcasters to occupy such an unbiased position through the political turmoil of the late 1970s. As Alan Protheroe, the assistant director-general of the BBC, put it:

It is not unknown . . . that a single item in a news broadcast or current affairs programme attracts directly contradictory accusations of bias. Traditionally the BBC has felt a certain sense of security in this situation, saying that if it is criticised equally from both ends of the spectrum, then it must be occupying the proper ground. Such complacency no longer serves as a defence in a society which is increasingly complex, and in a society where a number of professional critics from sociologists to politicians tend to blame the messenger for the direction of the message.¹

¹ Alan Protheroe, *Broadcast*, 7 October 1983.

The ‘professional sociologists’ who had criticized the BBC were clearly, for contemporary readers, the Glasgow Media Group, whose book *More Bad News*² had provoked an uproar in the television industry and in particular at the 1981 Edinburgh Television Festival. The book provided a fundamental challenge to the practices of ‘balance’ in broadcasting. It described the hurried decisions taken in television newsrooms, and allied this to a systematic statistical breakdown of unconscious bias in news coverage. Other criticism had come from John Birt and Peter Jay in 1975, arguing that the then construction of news and current affairs had a bias against understanding, as it prevented sufficient editorial analysis from which understanding would result.

² Glasgow Media Group, *More Bad News* (London: RKP, 1980).

The more intelligent regulators had already realized that some form of relaxation of habitual practices was in order. David Glencross, on becoming Director of Television at the IBA in 1983, wrote:

What impartiality means, or should mean above all, is fairness, an absence of editorial line. Impartiality . . . does not insist on equal time, nor on some precise mathematical balance, though there are times when impartiality is best achieved by this kind of equality.³

³ David Glencross, *The Guardian*, 14 October 1983.

This is a typical Glencross formulation, allowing a modicum of loosening yet warning of the problems of taking it too far. Glencross was open to Channel 4’s pressure for change and tended to judge each case on its own merits. His role as regulator was one crucial, and rarely acknowledged, contribution to Channel 4’s success in overturning many

4 Ibid.

5 Aubrey Singer's speech, as reported in *Television Weekly*, 2–8 February 1983.

of the key practices of 'balanced' television. He went on to outline how things were working in 1983:

Channel Four has quite properly and with the IBA's support, opened its door to a great deal of strong opinion, sometimes raw and unformed. That is part of the Channel's brief for innovation and distinctiveness. Due impartiality has been interpreted in a most liberal fashion. . . . But there was no 'balance' for example to Jeremy Seabrook's series on the Labour movement, *What Went Wrong*. There was no 'balance' to *Claret and Chips*, the four documentaries on the birth of the SDP.⁴

Glencross's relatively liberal stance can be measured by the more intemperate reactions of some senior broadcasters. Aubrey Singer, the Managing Director of Television at the BBC had already attacked Channel 4 for having broken with established broadcasting practices:

Channel 4's independent commissioning policy in the public affairs and documentary areas – a plethora of cheap, politically slanted programmes – makes a mockery of the idea of balance, and, because it is one-sided, the idea of alternative programmes. Taken as a whole its output debases the carefully placed and balanced output of the other networks.⁵

Singer's words demonstrate the sense of outrage and disruption caused by the arrival of Channel 4. Although Channel 4 was intended to upset the existing arrangements of broadcasting, it emerged into a complicated social environment which made that task far more difficult as well as more urgent. British society was both diversified and profoundly divided, yet had a broadcasting system which based its coverage of that society on the principles of impartiality and balance. This was not least because of the scarcity of television as a resource, despite its centrality in everyday life and political discourse. The production of television broadcasting was still an elite activity, undertaken exclusively by vertically integrated companies: the BBC and the regional partners in ITV. Pressure from within broadcasting had produced a demand for a more liberal regime which would enable a more diverse range of voices to be heard, for the richness of everyday activities to be recognized and catered for. In the difficult political circumstances of the early 1980s, this translated into a general and successful attempt to relax the rules and practices governing television content. Many independent producers working for Channel 4 shared some, if not all, of a set of broad aspirations: to challenge the political restrictions on broadcasting; to change who made programmes and how they made them; to change how programmes looked and sounded and how they conceived of and addressed their audiences. As the decade progressed, this idealistic tendency was to encounter, in a ragged and confused way, an altogether different trend towards liberalization: that which came in the wake of the increasingly confident Thatcher government.

In the early 1980s, the prevailing practices of broadcasting combined the formal rules of balance and impartiality with a set of more informal working practices. Broadcasting, according to many in senior management, should produce programmes which were broad in their address. They should be intelligible to the generality of the citizenry, making minimal assumptions of prior knowledge and should seek to engage rather than assume commitment. This made it difficult to address minority interests directly, be they those of gourmands or of the politically committed Left. In a period in which marketing was beginning to conceive of market segmentation as a key tool, the increasing diversity and specialization of consumer tastes and preferences were becoming more evident. Channel 4 had significant and early success in addressing lifestyle interests, virtually inventing the specialist lifestyle programme and reinventing consumer advocacy on television. Recent criticism of Channel 4 as a channel whose mid-evening schedule is dominated by lifestyle shows tends to forget that this has been 'part of the mix' since the very early days (though never as dominant as from 2004 onwards). Consumer series were initiated under the banner of education, with *For What it's Worth* (1982–84; general consumer issues) and *Well Being* (1982–85; health) as considerable early successes. Both managed to combine an easy, universalist presentational style with, at times, relatively challenging and arcane content. *The Wine Programme* (1983–85) was presented by wine expert Jancis Robinson and successfully introduced an oenological vulgate into popular discourse, making it easy to talk about the relatively unfamiliar topic of wine. Documentary series such as *Design Matters* (1983) and *Pottery Ladies* (1985) provided an in-depth examination of some surprising topics, whilst Kaffe Fassett's *Glorious Colour* (1986) made knitting into an exciting designerly occupation. Property programmes began with *A Cottage in the Country* and *A Kind of Living*, both first shown in 1983. Hostile journalism at the time tended to ignore these substantial innovations, preferring instead to take unfair cheap shots at a single documentary, *Quilts in Women's Lives* (1983), judging it on title rather than its merits.

The development of specialist lifestyle programming was an early success for Channel 4 in giving voice to more specialized interests. However, it proved far more difficult to find ways of achieving other aspirations to produce innovatory broadcasting. Two examples from the first months of broadcasting show the scale of the problems which producers were meeting: *Whatever You Want* (1982–83) and *The Friday Alternative* (1982–83). *Whatever You Want* is described by Maggie Brown as 'a mouthy, opinionated magazine in the format that came to be known as access television . . . hosted by Keith Allen from a bunker called the Zig Zag Club'.⁶ Commissioned by Mike Bolland as part of his

6 Maggie Brown, *A Licence to be Different: the Story of Channel Four* (London: British Film Institute, 2007), p. 64.

7 Ibid., pp. 69–70.

‘youth’ brief, it was cancelled in the spring of 1983, with Bolland commenting, according to the minutes of an internal meeting:

ultimately this programme is inconsistent, badly shaped and underscripted and cannot hold a regular audience. The producer and research team were ill-prepared for leaving institutional broadcasting. The programme looks like it comes from a garage underneath County Hall and just isn’t good enough. I am increasingly convinced that this sort of magazine mix is not what young people want to see in 1983.⁷

Bolland’s replacement for *Whatever You Want* was *The Tube* (1983–87), which was extraordinarily successful, concentrating on presenting cutting-edge music. Its success as a music-based programme has obscured the bold, eclectic aspirations of *Whatever You Want*, whose undoubted failure shows the problems that Channel 4 faced in trying to innovate. The New Year programme (shown on 3 January 1983) vividly demonstrates both the ambitions of the programme and why it was likely to fail. Billed in the *TV Times* as ‘the usual new year rubbish, in fact’, it was staged as a live studio party event with invited guests, many seen enjoying cans of Harp and Carlsberg lager. Some taped inserts are cut in, including a critical interview by Keith Allen with Shirley Williams, founder of the newly-formed centrist SDP, under a Christmas tree. He rattled her by accusing her of a lack of empathy with unemployed youth. Allen also hosted a live discussion between three young politicians, a forgotten Tory, Sue Slipman (then in the SDP phase of her political career) and the ‘unofficial Labour candidate for Bermondsey’ Peter Tatchell. The guests at the studio party included ‘George Michael of Wham’, Julien Temple, Marianne Faithfull (missing a front tooth), Boy George in full regalia, and a mass of other guests sitting at tables. Two bands played a single number each, and the hour-long programme ended with an ‘entertainment’ based on the pagan ritual of new year sacrifice. There were a number of staged conversations about the past year, raising topics from latest films like *ET* to the Beverley Hills diet and the then new campaigns to ban lead in petrol and set up bottle banks for recycling. The magazine format was eclectic in the extreme, bringing together conventional and non-parliamentary left politics, mainstream popular culture and alternative lifestyles.

Such a mixture was unprecedented on British television, as politics tended to be corralled into programmes of its own. When European television has taken on such a mixture, it has tended to stay within the mainstream and even then has needed a presenter of formidable talent to hold the mixture together. Instead, this format featured Allen (an unpredictable presenter, to say the least) in focused segments, leaving the studio presentation to Allen’s female copresenter and a guest, the actor David Rappaport fresh from his role in the film *Time Bandits* and the ITV children’s series *Tiswas*. Rappaport’s unenviable task turned out to be that of a roving interviewer, trying to engage the studio guests in conversation. Collectively they provide a bravura display of inarticulacy

and posing which at the time was just embarrassing, provoking responses like that of commissioning editor Bolland, quoted above.

In retrospect, however, this is a good example of the sheer difficulty of breaking with the conventions of television speech. Some, like Boy George, affect an inverse snobbery. When asked 'Did you meet anyone interesting in 1982?' he replies 'Yes, and none of them are here'. An anonymous young woman refuses to talk at all, turning her back to the camera, an odd response from someone who has volunteered to come to a live television show. The dreadlocked poet Michael Smith responds in a zombie-like monotone, wishing eventually for world peace. In desperation, Rappaport turns to the cameraman and asks what he wishes for in 1983, getting the response 'to enjoy making programmes like this much more than I do', whereupon there is an abrupt cut to a commercial break. Presenters and guests alike are uncertain about how to speak and to whom they might be speaking. Guests are uncertain whether they should enter into a dialogue with Rappaport or try to make speeches to camera. Several defiantly use forms of speech and references that they obviously know to be incomprehensible outside their peer group. Both guests and presenters are uncertain whether the viewing audience is 'one of us' or a hostile other. They are uncertain about what they can take for granted in terms of what viewers might know or believe. In this context, comedy can often misfire and even become impossible; the gesture of turning away from the camera becomes emblematic of the impossibility of the whole endeavour. Individuals remain sealed within their own discourses, aware only of the probability of a hostile response if they try to communicate beyond their circle. Such was the situation of many to the left of British politics at that time, unable to articulate much beyond a profound pessimism and sense of rejection.

A more successful attempt to change the forms of address of television can be found in *The Friday Alternative*. Brown's description summarizes its general reputation:

From the very first show . . . it raised hackles in powerful places. It was uneven, reckless and immature and was prone to leaving out inconvenient bits of an argument. But it also ran items unlike anything else on television.⁸

It was scheduled in a meaningful way, from 7.30 to 8.00 on a Friday evening, taking up half of the slot occupied on other weekdays by Channel 4 News. This gave particular significance to its title. It was explicitly an alternative to ITN's view of the world, and ITN responded by refusing to sell it any of its news footage, a boycott to which Channel 4 turned an institutional blind eye. *The Friday Alternative's* politics were more complex than Brown allows in her verdict that it was 'the most radical of news programmes with such a left-leaning agenda that it triggered immediate special monitoring by the Regulator'.⁹ *The Friday Alternative* was a programme put together by young journalists like Steve Hewlett (later editor of BBC's *Panorama*), David Graham, a

⁸ Ibid., p. 87.

⁹ Ibid., p. 63.

disaffected *Panorama* producer, and Anna Coote, previously the deputy editor of the *New Statesman*. Some on the team espoused radical rather than left-ish values, those of the critical journalist rather than the political vanguard. So from the outset the series had a distinctly populist tendency, underpinned by the recruitment of viewers' groups around the country. These groups, conceived in the form of what are now called 'focus groups', were intended to feed into the editorial process. One group in particular was keen that there should be a programme arguing for the reintroduction of hanging as a punishment for murder. Such an item was produced, despite the protests of many in the production team.

From the outset, *The Friday Alternative* looked and sounded different. Peter Donebauer, who had previously produced video art, often working with musicians, created an ingenious computer-graphic-based format when all around were still using the paper and print basis of analogue television graphics. Based on rapidly alternating green, red and black horizontal stripes and simple lettering, it provided the programme not only with a distinctive look but also with a means of dispensing entirely with onscreen presenters. Instead, the visual presentation used slogan-words, text appearing letter-by-letter or (hand-drawn) cartoons. A good example of the programme is an item from 21 January 1983. The programme had obtained a recording of a conversation between the BBC and Thatcher's press office, made by a radio amateur. It was an argument between the press secretary Bernard Ingham and Alan Protheroe, the Assistant Director-General of the BBC, whose views on balance are quoted above. The BBC had been tipped off by Ingham's office that Thatcher was about to make a secret visit to the Falklands, so that the BBC would be sure to keep a crew there. The BBC got the footage but wanted to run it as an exclusive. In the phone call, Ingham insists that it should be 'pooled' (or shared) with ITV. Of particular significance was the tenor of the conversation, with Protheroe's elegantly weighed formulations being brushed aside by the altogether more robust Ingham. The subject matter was less important than the style, showing the shifting nature of power and the disruptive radicalism of the Thatcher government as it realized it could intimidate an organization like the BBC. The item ends with Ingham's crowing phone call to Thatcher: 'We won!' The presentation is stark, consisting of alternating stills of Ingham and Protheroe with words spelled out in captions, as the recording is full of static.

The item, one of three in the half-hour programme, presents its evidence in the form of an unfolding narrative from which it then draws the conclusion that the government obtained maximum coverage by pressurizing the BBC, and that 'the BBC fought very hard against it, but lost'. There is no attempt to obtain comments from any of the participants or their organizations, a procedure often associated with attempts to avoid bias. This was no routine rant about the government or the establishment but rather a demonstration of the growing fissures within the British power structure. The item was technically in breach of the

10 Ibid., p. 87.

Wireless Telegraphy Act, but was cleared for broadcast by Channel 4 as it was in the public interest. The chair of the IBA received some Home Office pressure to prevent the programme, but resisted.¹⁰ This one item demonstrates how *The Friday Alternative* opened the way for several of the television innovations of the later 1980s and 1990s. It shows that instant history is possible, a potential built on by later series made by Norma Percy and the Brook Lapping company, including *The Thatcher Factor* (1991) and *The Death of Yugoslavia* (1995). It also demonstrated the intrinsic interest of 'inside the media' programmes, and of a more disputatious attitude to current affairs driven by the revelation of the harsh nature of negotiations between the powerful.

Both *The Friday Alternative* and *Whatever You Want* were made in a new way, by independent companies. Both programmes involved established professionals, but with different results. *The Friday Alternative* was a calculated piece of extremism, providing an 'oppositional' stance that sometimes suffered from similar problems of address as *Whatever You Want*. But it made a virtue of its low-budget limitations and lack of news footage by creating a distinctive look. The producers of *Whatever You Want* proved unable to reconstruct the necessary infrastructure for a live studio programme, which requires a large number of people to prepare guests and ensure that they are aware of what is required of them. The two companies involved, Diverse Productions and RPM Productions, show the potentials and problems of the newly invented form of independent production. Both broke down the traditional hierarchies of production administration (though not of shooting, as is evident from the acid comment of *Whatever You Want*'s cameraman). Both were companies formed to make a particular programme, with RPM dissolving with the termination of the contract and Diverse undertaking a painful evolution to produce its next commission, the more orthodox current affairs series *Diverse Reports*.

Independent producers formed limited companies to trade, but in the overwhelming majority of cases they had just one customer, Channel 4. The standard contract for Channel 4 work was a cost-plus arrangement, in which the actual costs of production were minutely inspected by Channel 4 production accountants and a standard percentage 'fee' was calculated on the basis of the agreed total. In 1982, many individual independent producers had a feeling that they were involved in a common cultural project to create a new kind of television, what all about them referred to as 'The Channel'. Channel 4 began to insist on a distanced business relationship in order to preserve some degree of editorial freedom to commission, especially as in the early years there was a culture of permanent revolution in commissioning and decommissioning rather than one of extending the contracts of successful programmes as elsewhere in television. As the 1980s progressed it became clear that if production companies were to grow larger or even to have access to other broadcasters, then producers would have to lobby for access to BBC and ITV. This, in the form of a 25% quota, was introduced

- 11 John Ellis, *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty* (London: IB Tauris, 2000), pp. 148–61.

in the Broadcasting Act of 1990. The ideology of ‘independence’ formed a successful alliance with free market ideas in order to make this happen.

By that time, many other changes had taken place in television. Broadcasting had become offer-led rather than demand-led as competition increased and Sky’s direct broadcast satellite service was launched.¹¹ Attempts to research and define the audiences for particular programmes became common. As a result, editorial interventions by Channel 4 commissioning editors into the substance of programming became more routine. To many of the producers who had worked in the early phase of ‘The Channel’, it seemed that they had more independence but less freedom. The independent production sector had become increasingly professionalized and difficult to enter. There was pressure even from within Channel 4 to rationalize 700 to 800 companies into a few large groups. This increasingly began to happen, so that by the end of the 1990s independent production had become a sector of large companies supplying a wide range of broadcasters with a diversity of programme products. By that time also, Channel 4 had become a channel largely devoted to the sixteen-to-thirty-four audience segment, about to launch Michael Jackson’s risky strategy of investment in paid-for digital channels.

By the 1990s, Channel 4 had become part of a new broadcasting environment, which it had been crucial in setting up. The cases of *Whatever You Want* and *The Friday Alternative* show quite how difficult that process was. Broadcasting eventually became more diverse and adventurous in its approaches to many subjects. The vetting of programmes disappeared with the 1990 Act. Balance and the universality of address had given way to a looser regime which still valued fairness and accessibility but not at the cost of preventing the expression of opinion. Yet Channel 4 failed to adapt as radically as it had forced the independent sector to adapt. After the large-scale losses of Film Four and other paid-for ventures initiated by Michael Jackson, Channel 4 has existed in an uneasy double existence, dependent on *Big Brother* for ten per cent of its income and overly identified with lifestyle programming. The Channel 4 of 2008 is uncertain whether its future lies as a public service organization to stand alongside the BBC, or as a commercial organization with an edgy but upmarket image. Channel 4 gave this new broadcasting environment to us, but has found no new role for itself within it.

'Keeping it real': the politics of Channel 4's multiculturalism, mainstreaming and mandates

SARITA MALIK

When Channel 4 decided how it was going to fill what was described in the Annan Report as 'the empty room of British broadcasting', it was agreed that Britain's Africans, Caribbeans and Asians were to be important residents. This was meaningful for Channel 4 because it was tasked with providing what Stephen Lambert then described as 'opportunities for talents which had previously not been fully served' and with serving needs 'which have not been fully defined'.¹

And yet the recent history of the channel has been characterized by the closing stages of a particular kind of 'public service' approach; one in which ethnic minorities have become simultaneously integrated in and disconnected from mainstream output in distinct ways. Twenty-five years on, the channel is caught up in the difficulties facing the structuring of public service broadcasting and in the challenges posed by the highly contentious politics of recognition for the settlement of the relation between a variety of social rights. On the one hand, black and Asian Britons, who as part of the postcolonial phase of migration to the UK might be regarded as the 'old ethnics', do not now appear to be a priority for Channel 4. On the other, the legacy of the relationship between Channel 4, these communities and broader ideals of 'multiculturalism' appears to be strong, not least according to the channel's current claims.

The channel's most recent cultural diversity statement says that 'Multicultural programmes remain at the heart of Channel 4's 2007 schedule', and in a summary of its Race Equality Scheme, Channel 4 states its ongoing commitment. In public discourse, therefore, the

¹ Stephen Lambert, *Television with a Difference* (London: British Film Institute, 1982), p. 100.

- 2 In 2006 there was widespread agreement amongst a range of public political figures that the idea of multiculturalism was outdated. Tony Blair, then Prime Minister, argued that: 'The right to be different. The duty to integrate. That is what being British means.' Ruth Kelly, the Communities Secretary, said: 'We have moved from a period of near uniform consensus on the value of multiculturalism to one where we can encourage that debate by questioning whether it is encouraging separateness.'

channel is keen to emphasize continuity over change. Strategically this is important because the ideology of 'multiculturalism' has always been a significant aspect of the channel's branding: a nod to the fact that the channel is publicly accountable in a unique way and that it is the champion of otherwise unheard, marginalized or misrepresented voices. Cultural diversity is, of course also a key facet of the liberal project.

But Channel 4's relationship with ethnic minorities has *not* been uncontested, static or fixed. Change has occurred on several fronts, but chiefly in two areas. First, in its approach to representation; changes have occurred against a broader sociopolitical backdrop in which definitions and attitudes towards the idea of 'multiculturalism' have altered and also lost favour. Second, in its relationship with key stakeholders, including the public and its product-suppliers. Amongst these are black independent producers who do not feature heavily in the channel's list of 'preferred suppliers', the larger, trusted companies that began to dominate in the 1990s. Both these areas have been heavily shaped by an increasingly competitive marketplace which has undermined many of the values of Channel 4's original remit and, to a certain extent, the public's trust in the channel. The path of such developments has involved investment and disinvestment, transparency and duplicity, and a trajectory that can most straightforwardly be described as moving from the radical to the conventional. The 'duty to be different' has therefore been challenged both by intensifying market competition and the broader political emphasis on the 'duty to integrate'.²

Historical background is important, as it underpins the relationship between Channel 4 and Britain's black and Asian communities. Channel 4, as part of a broader regime of cultural governance, positively acknowledged Britain's multicultural lived experience in both representation and structure. It became what might be called a 'multicultural public sphere'. Channel 4 had been campaigned for by those who realized the importance of introducing a third space to the BBC and ITV duopoly. For many minority groups, this new home was a direct result of the unprecedented degree of pressure placed on state institutions to alleviate discrimination and disadvantage. Ethnic minorities, along with women and youth audiences, represented the Channel's principal target groups in its remit to cater for distinct and neglected audiences.

Channel 4's core objectives, like the founding principles of UK public service broadcasting, were not based exclusively on market share but on providing programmes that large sections of the public often did not really want to watch. Moreover, Channel 4's cultural-political agenda was even more explicit than the BBC's, which had typically adopted a more broad-based, conservative approach to what constitutes 'multiculture'. By contrast, and essentially because of the moment in which it was born, Channel 4's characterization of 'diversity' was as something edgy, modern, fluid and decentred. During the 1970s and 1980s, the shift towards practical strategies of antiracism – positive action, ethnic minority inclusion and contract compliance – to which

- 3 David Bailey and Stuart Hall, 'Critical decade: black British photography in the 80s', *Ten.8*, vol. 2, no. 3 (1992), p. 7.

- 4 See Alkarim Jivani, 'Channelling the past', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 17, no. 12 (2007).

- 5 See Kobena Mercer (ed.), *Black Film, British Cinema*, ICA Documents, no. 7 (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1988).

Channel 4 contributed, was implemented as a tougher and more direct intervention to enable social change than the ideological struggle for 'multiculturalism'. Ideas filtering through from the New Left provided a justification for resisting the simple ambition to assimilate.

The 1980s was 'a critical decade'³ both because of the emergence of this cultural space under the management of the channel's first chief executive, Jeremy Isaacs, and because it was the moment in which the public debate about race relations opened up. Many of those who pushed issues of 'race' onto the agenda of British television came largely from outside the broadcasting institutions, which were still predominantly white-led and focused in terms of content and address. Amid such developments, the audiovisual space for Britain's emerging independent sector was being redefined. The lobbying and debates about training and access for Britain's black cultural workers helped to prepare the ground for the formation of Channel 4. The channel's commitment to 'say new things in new ways', its minority-based rationale formally inscribed in a Multicultural Programmes Department, along with its commitment to independent filmmaking, meant that it could offer a new form of cultural support to black British film and programme-makers. This included the emergence of independent production companies commissioned to work on individual projects but also the grant-aided workshop sector, a space in which collectives could produce relatively small-scale, innovative and experimental films.

This support and general agreements about pay negotiated with ACTT (Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians) meant that such groups could avoid the constraints of commercialism and the logic of the marketplace.⁴ There was also, however, a large amount of dependency involved in such arrangements, with no reciprocal guarantees for producers. But Channel 4 as publisher/broadcaster had a distinct structural advantage by being able to tap into new and often untested talent. Creatively, a certain cultural energy and distinctiveness was also recognized as emerging from 'minority' cultural practitioners, arguably because they had, to date, been forced to operate from the margins of the creative industries and of British political life.⁵ The impact of *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Stephen Frears, 1985) exemplified perfectly the potential gains at stake here, not only for audiences but also for critics and the academic community.

Onscreen, Channel 4 produced dedicated slots and structures to cater for black and Asian audiences. With minority programming uniquely built into its structure, organization and output was explicitly linked. By the late 1980s, Channel 4 was airing a number of 'black programmes' which were often staffed from producer level downwards by black media workers. Over the years, it was primarily factually-based productions such as *Eastern Eye* (1982–85), *Black on Black* (1983–85), *The Bandung File* (1985–91), *Black Bag* (1991–97) and *Devil's Advocate* (1992–96) that became the leading examples of black programming, focusing on issues that were seen to be directly relevant for black and

Asian communities. And the emphasis on developing black British production talent meant that there were breakthroughs in other genres: for example, through the popular comedy series *Desmond's* (1988–94) new writers, many of them women, were introduced to the industry.

It is easy to summarize such breakthroughs in simple and glowing terms. But there were of course also specific politics and problems involved. The relative autocracy of some of the Multicultural Programmes Department's commissioning editors was attacked. The gradual relocation of minority programming from peak-time to graveyard slots was criticized. And partly because of the high expectations from minority practitioners, Channel 4's recruitment practices were widely criticized for not doing enough, and for sidestepping both new and existing black talent. By 1990, largely as a result of financial strain within a number of public arts institutions, the revenue funding of independent film and video workshops had virtually ceased. The 1990 Broadcasting Act and a change to Channel 4's funding arrangement in 1993 were significant milestones in determining future priorities. Concurrently the channel, now under the direction of Michael Grade, was faced with the emergence of increasing competition, lighter-touch regulation and technological advances, and began to show different kinds of investment towards more obvious ratings-pullers such as US imports. What was once mainstream began to be squeezed out to the margins as some areas of investment faced more pressure than others.

We can locate the critical turn away from the idea of multiculturalism in the mid 1990s. Essentially this involved a break from a race politics underpinned by a quantitative or so-called 'politically correct' response to a multicultural society to one that positions 'cultural diversity' as a qualitative mindset that depends on 'common sense' – not something that can simply or easily be enforced or implemented through targets or positive action measures if it wants to be consequential and champion its goals. Discursive shifts within public service broadcasting were symptomatic of this wider change. Media policy in general began to shift towards a more mainstream and less nuanced definition of 'multiculturalism' as 'cultural diversity'. This policy shift also later coincided with the public focus on 'institutional racism', following the 1999 Macpherson Report,⁶ a milestone which appeared to trigger, at least on the surface, a surge of proactive responses in favour of cultural diversity in the arts and media (rather than, it should be noted, against racism). In 2000, for example, a network of UK broadcasters including Channel 4 established the Cultural Diversity Network, designed to promote cultural diversity on and off screen, although its impact in significantly addressing the issue is uncertain.

The most illustrative consequence of the redistributive project occurred when the decision was taken in 2002 that Channel 4's Multicultural Programmes Department should close. Channel 4 now repositioned multicultural representations as part of a broader diversity agenda in which ethnic diversity was just one component.⁷

6 A report resulting from an inquiry into the police's handling of the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence. URL: <http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm42/4262/4262.htm> [accessed 21 June 2008].

7 In Channel 4's 2007 Statement of Programme Policy, 'Cultural and other diversity' is located in the 'Additional Matters' section, p. 23.

8 Michael Jackson, 'The fourth way', *The Observer*, 29 July 2001.

This supported a broader ethos of viewers as 'viewers' rather than viewers as 'anyone-in-particular'. It was suggested that, like British society, Channel 4 had 'moved on' and that the real future of ethnic minority representation was in mainstream programming. The reorganization of support, or arguably disinvestment, was almost certainly a decision based more on mounting commercial pressure, as the multichannel system boomed, than on cultural intelligence. However, this was not the way it was publicly described. In 2001, Michael Jackson, who had been Channel 4's chief executive since 1997, explained the rationale for the new approach:

Twenty years ago television didn't honestly reflect society. Channel 4 was launched in 1982 to give a voice to those who were under-represented on the three channels that then existed. In 2001 the 'minorities' of those times have been assimilated into the mainstream of society.⁸

Once a pioneer in introducing the idea of antiracism into the liberal project, the channel now assumed a more customary position, using the language of integration. Of course, in many ways, specialist minority programming did work against public service broadcasting principles of universality. This approach is always in tension with, on the one hand, the 'struggle for recognition' and, on the other, the critique from neoliberalism that it represents a drag on the market. It is open to the idea that there is no payoff from an apparent engagement of political debate into structural questions of redistribution in the economic sphere. It also calls into question the idea that 'difference' can be the basis for effective political agency.

However, the rationale given by Jackson was far less theoretical. The closure of the Multicultural Department signalled, for better or worse, the official declaration of post-multiculturalism within public service broadcasting. On a practical level, the nuances of this shift removed certain requirements for the quantity and source of minority-based output, something that the Multicultural Programmes Department was designed to help systematize. In 2002, the new head of Channel 4, Mark Thompson, spoke in his MacTaggart Lecture about a new kind of public service and about trusting individual commissioning editors to 'ensure that the programme-makers they use are really representative of the culturally diverse country we serve'. In that year's 'Statement of Promises', the function of the Multicultural Department was still being publicly promoted: 'The Multicultural Department has a specific remit to be ahead of the curve and interrogate multicultural Britain in unexpected ways.'

The tangible outputs stemming from this new response to Britain's cultural diversity were, however, difficult to discern onscreen. Therefore, the closure might be understood as a symbolic gesture and certainly more expedient and consequential than Channel 4's assimilationist and 'common-sense' rhetoric would have its public believe. The new

- 9 Arun Kundnani, 'How liberals lost their anti-racism,' *Institute of Race Relations*, 3 October 2007. URL: <http://www.irr.org.uk/2007/october/ha000008.html> [accessed 21 June 2008].

proposal, that integration is good and segregation is bad, continues to work today in line with broader political-cultural philosophies around multiculturalism. This is underpinned by an implicit assumption not just that social equality has basically been achieved but also that multicultural agendas have done more damage than good. In 2005, Trevor Phillips, then chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, predicted that Britain was 'sleepwalking into segregation'. Phillips, who at the start of his career had worked as a television researcher on London Weekend Television's black factual programme *Skin* (1980), argued that decades of multicultural policies had served to deepen racial divisions and increase tensions.

This sea-change has been usefully outlined in a more general context by Arun Kundnani in his essay 'How liberals lost their anti-racism'.⁹ Here, Kundnani argues that many former left-leaning liberals have now shifted to the right, and that today even the updated liberal ideal of 'cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance' is regarded as too soft and not interventionist enough by mainstream liberals. And yet, we know that in British society social inequality persists, as do claims from ethnic minorities for 'better representation'. And this is in spite, not because, of decades of multicultural policies. Within British society popular narratives around 'asylum seekers', 'black gun crime', 'freedom of speech', the 'clash of civilizations' and most of all 'the war on terror', define today's racialized agenda. 9/11 intensified the retort against multiculturalism; it also interrupted the beginning of the movement towards cultural diversity and recognition of 'institutional racism' that had, until then, been gaining momentum. For many, these tropes are precisely the reasons that validate our current post-multicultural sensibility, because they symbolize the problem with 'difference' and anything ranging from the failures to the dangers of liberal multiculturalism. They have sustained a national preoccupation with evaluating the merits of multiculturalism and suggest that questions of belonging and difference in our society are still heavily dependent on themes of cultural identity and, indeed, 'race'. Such thinking now occupies the middle ground, making Channel 4's revised ethos in the early-to-mid 2000s very much 'of the moment' – acceptable and perhaps even inevitable. It demonstrates how the 'loss' of antiracism has been institutionalized.

As the only UK terrestrial channel to have been established with multicultural programming embedded as part of its infrastructure and core practice, the impact of these new social philosophies on broadcast media and, specifically, the closure of the specialist department has, remarkably, passed with very little public comment or introspection. At an event held at Channel 4 in 2007 to mark both its twenty-fifth anniversary and Black History Month, 'To Black and beyond: the Black image on TV', these changes within Channel 4 largely went unacknowledged, but the same general problems of access and racially-coded representation were seen to persist. There was a certain

kind of cultural amnesia at work – a lack of reference to Channel 4's important history in relation to ethnic minorities – which seemed to be characteristic both of broader patterns of forgetting with regard to black history and the legacy of the idea of what the channel still stands for.

At the event, Janey Walker, Channel 4's Managing Editor for Commissioning, suggested that there is a 'rose-tinted view' of Channel 4's Multicultural Programmes Department and that the main reason it closed was because of the high level of complaints from minority producers that their access to other departments such as Drama or Comedy, were blocked because they were always directed to the Multicultural Programmes Department. This argument calls into question how a holistic commitment to cultural diversity might be interpreted within and across the channel and also that each commissioning editor will necessarily 'instinctively' take on board the responsibility to platform multiculturalism as Thompson had proposed in 2002.

Indeed, in March 2008, these assertions were apparently contradicted when Channel 4 announced that as part of its major review of its public service role, it was going to work on:

reinvigorating its connection with minority audiences, including appointing a new Head of Diversity, assigning a commissioning editor specific responsibility for multicultural programmes, with a ring-fenced budget and slots at 9pm and 10pm, and doubling the budget for the commissioning team's diversity placement scheme.¹⁰

Significantly, these new initiatives have occurred within the framework of an ever-more commercially-oriented media environment within which Channel 4 is under extreme pressure, as indicated in Ofcom's second public service broadcasting review in 2008. Channel 4's current public-service drive is entwined with its renewed diversity emphasis (which arguably sits at the heart of a public service ethos). It is an important aspect of the organization's strategy to attract monies in a digital age in which the era of traditional public service broadcasting is fast eroding. Conspicuously, the BBC also announced a renewed drive in 2008, which involves the broadcaster spending £750,000 on strategies to fill more top positions with ethnic minorities and includes a mentoring and development programme over three years. The fruits of such strategic planning are, at the time of writing, yet to be seen.

The bigger picture also means that, largely because of timing, ethnic minorities have been incorporated, in different ways, as a more general part of the mainstream. Although the use of Jackson's definitive claim that minorities have been 'assimilated into the mainstream' as the *raison d'être* for organizational change is problematic, by the late 1990s black and Asian communities had become more established within British society. In broad terms, there was an emerging and confident third generation and a bigger ethnic minority general workforce in parts of the creative industries. The 'old ethnics', once at the vanguard of struggles

¹⁰ Quoted in Ofcom, *Second Public Service Broadcasting Review Phase One: the Digital Opportunity* (2008), p. 106. URL: http://www.ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/psb2_1/ [accessed 21 June 2008].

for media access and Channel 4's diversity concerns, were now positioning themselves as the 'new diasporas', engaging with cable and satellite services more than any other part of the UK population. The transnationalization of broadcasting had begun to have a profound effect on Britain's ethnic minority audiences who seemed, in fact, to be very keen to be positioned as viewers from 'somewhere-in-particular'.

Meanwhile, the general circuit of Channel 4's onscreen representation, from newsreaders to soap characters to participants in lifestyle shows, now gives the appearance of a more ethnically diverse Britain. On the whole, the demise of specialist ethnic programming *did* in fact coincide with a more general inclusion of ethnic minority representation in everyday output. But far from being the result of well-planned policy, this transition into the mainstream is largely down to simultaneous changes that have happened within the industry. Specifically, the rise in aspirational lifestyle programming in the 1990s and its migration from daytime programming to the weekday early-evening schedules, most notably on Channel 4, was the primary route through which black and Asian images became 'mainstreamed' and more commonplace for a broader range of the viewing public. As Charlotte Brunsdon notes: 'through their choice of participants, programmes such as these make a considerable contribution to changing ideas of what it is to be British'.¹¹

Traditional notions of authored access found in the 1970s and 1980s¹² were reinterpreted in the form of docu-soaps, video diaries, makeover and lifestyle shows, giving a highly public platform to a larger range of cultural and social 'types'. In addition, because the reality genre is relatively unscripted compared with non-reality or narrative television, it largely escapes serious accusations of misrepresentation, lack of authenticity or stereotyping – all criticisms that Channel 4 producers, editors and scriptwriters had long wrestled with when considering how to represent ethnic minorities in the 'right' ways. Whilst what Brunsdon calls the 'pluralling up'¹³ in these genres achieves the demographic project of boosting the numbers, the fact that this has occurred in reliable (and often proven global) formats that are almost guaranteed ratings-winners is important. When it comes to the market, inclusion of ethnic minorities in reliable formats is both low risk *and* has the added bonus of meeting cultural objectives.

But in a moment that is seeing intense scrutiny of certain approaches to some programme-making, the question of media parity now, more than ever, has to be understood within the context of a range of concerns, both commercial and ethical. 2007's *Celebrity Big Brother* beautifully demonstrated the tricky balancing act that might be involved here, and how (Channel 4's) 'reality entertainment' can, in fact, forcefully clash with how ethnicity and race are managed. When the Bollywood actress Shilpa Shetty was bullied and racially taunted by fellow 'celebrity' housemates including Jade Goody, Channel 4's bungling treatment of the race row raised public concern about where exactly it draws the

¹¹ Charlotte Brunsdon, 'Lifestyling Britain: the 8–9 slot on British television', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2003), p. 13.

¹² See Sarita Malik, *Representing Black Britain: Black and Asian Images on Television* (London: Sage, 2002).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

boundaries of commercial *and* political expediency. *Celebrity Big Brother* foregrounded precisely these issues around ethnic minority representation, communication rights and the politics of recognition. Channel 4's non-intervention as the gang bullying intensified was defended by an alibi of genre-etiquette; that is, the producers could not be seen to 'intrude' and spoil the natural order of things in the house. Of course, the real codes of reality television demand that it is never left fully uninterrupted by the manoeuvring of those in the business of programme-making in order to generate interest, by devising tasks, editing strategically, interviewing provocatively, and so on.

The real story here is not about Shilpa versus Jade, or the question of whether the abuse is tantamount to racism or bullying, it is about Channel 4 and the public. The damning Ofcom verdict ruled, amongst other things, that Channel 4 had broken its broadcasting code by not declaring knowledge of (unbroadcast) racist footage, including film showing some of the *Celebrity Big Brother* housemates using the word 'Paki' in a limerick. Once recognized as championing ethnic diversity, Channel 4 mediated conflict in order to maximize ratings, and as Tessa Jowell (the then Culture, Media and Sport Secretary) put it, gave audiences little more than 'racism being presented as entertainment'.¹⁴ The response to the reality series, as Channel 4 found out when unprecedented complaints were made to Ofcom, served as a sharp reminder that audiences have communication rights and cultural sensitivities that need to be recognized when tasked with serving a diverse public. Channel 4's chief executive at the time, Andy Duncan, admitted the channel had failed to see the viewers as 'real people, rather than ratings';¹⁵ a candid comment that is suggestive of the reconceptualization of the television 'citizen' as a television 'consumer'.

Channel 4 is at a critical juncture with respect to these concerns. Its scheduling of the heavily publicized and discussed landmark two-part drama, *Britz* (2007) in its twenty-fifth anniversary week cast the spotlight on some of the intricacies involved. Based around a British Asian Muslim sister and brother who respectively become a terrorist and join MI5 to protect British security, *Britz* was provocatively marketed with an image of the siblings and the strapline 'Whose side are you on?'. On the one hand, *Britz* can be seen to follow and exacerbate recurrent tabloid themes around Islam: suicide bombers, the rise of terrorism, British Jihadism. On the other, it offers a political commentary on British anti-terror legislation and addresses the issues from an alternative starting point. Its high-budget production values make a mockery of the budgets involved in early black programming, and as a drama/thriller it marks a genre breakthrough in terms of where we still typically tend to see British Asians on television. Questions about the politics of its authorship have been raised because the drama was directed by a white man, Peter Korminsky, even though his track record would suggest he helped to produce an exhilarating piece of television drama. But if one takes into

¹⁴ Jowell, quoted in *The Guardian*, 19 January 2007, p. 1.

¹⁵ Duncan, quoted in *The Guardian*, 28 May 2007, p. 1.

16 See 'The search for common ground: Muslims, non-Muslims and the UK media', Greater London Authority, November 2007. URL: http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/equalities/docs/commonground_report.pdf [accessed 21 June 2008].

account the context of Channel 4's dwindling investment in black and Asian creative producers, the concerns are entirely valid.

When thinking about developments onscreen, it is clear that Asians in particular have recently become more visible, whilst Africans and Caribbeans have been notable for their growing absence, a verifiable shift from a decade ago when the reverse could be said to be the case. The reasons for the emergence of the disparity between the amount of black and Asian representation can largely be attributed to an increased focus on 'Asianness' in the popular imagination; an interest fuelled not just by the 'positive' commodification of a globalized, Bollywood-influenced South Asian popular culture, but also by the 'negative' preoccupation with Islam. This is not to liken Channel 4's programming of Islam to a tabloid agenda, but the channel has piggy-backed on the popular interest in Islam and its associated discourse at a time when British Muslims are already such a substantial source of media content, and only in particular ways.¹⁶

The issues that have been outlined here are especially timely insofar as changes within the ecology of public service broadcasting are having an important impact on the delivery and content of minority programming. Three sets of concerns will help to conclude.

Firstly, what future opportunities exist for ethnic minorities to be granted their communication *rights* by Channel 4? This involves investigating how public policy works in conjunction with competitive market forces and cultural demands. It requires us to look beyond onscreen representation to consider the critical relationship between two trajectories: the threat to traditional public service delivery and the appetite of ethnic groups for 'better representation'. Specifically, one might ask how the tension between changes in the mediascape and in the politics of recognition is reflected in the structuring and regulation of Channel 4 with regards to ethnic representation in a maturing postcolonial Britain. The key challenge here is to reduce the gap between the importance ethnic minority viewers place on trust in Channel 4 and their satisfaction with its delivery.

Secondly, we need to consider how the politics of difference is recognized and accommodated within a media culture which aspires to 'sameness'. Ethnic and racial consciousness is an emergent property of particular sorts of social relations connecting issues of citizenship, value pluralism and the role of community, not least in the ways ethnic minority groups generate media practices. But as broadcast media in general becomes more divergent and at the same time more cloned, how *responsible* is Channel 4 for taking on a more distinctive public service approach to ethnic minority representation?

Finally, we should analyze the *creative* basis of ethnic minority production. For example, does a black programme-maker producing a documentary in a dedicated black programme series, have, as was felt by many who worked in specialist departments, more freedom of creative and/or political expression when they are not working in and for a

mainstream series with other sets of expectations? What are the artistic implications of moving from the margins to the centre in this way? This is a question premised on issues of innovation and production (culturally diverse *expression*) which have been forcefully elided by the heavily policy-oriented narrative (cultural diversity *policy*) in this area.

‘Black’ is simply not on the agenda in the same way that it was when the channel first started, but then much has changed over the past twenty-five years and the shifts need to be read in context. Today, all commissioning teams and independent producers have new responsibilities for ensuring that Channel 4 reflects a modern, vibrant, multicultural Britain. But this is not a transparent agreement and certainly not one which can be held to account by the public in clear or precise ways. Lessons from the past, more open consultation with its many publics, and recognition of each viewer as a citizen, not just a consumer, may help work through some of the issues of rights, responsibilities and creativity outlined here.

Distribution and the question of diversity: a case study of Cinenova

JULIA KNIGHT and PETER THOMAS

In the history of film studies as a discipline, we have tended to privilege the text and its production context as the object of study, together with a growing interest in audiences, spectatorship and exhibition practices. Distribution – the largely invisible link in the chain – has been critically neglected. Over the years there have been a handful of articles and book chapters which have addressed the role of distribution and its crucial links with promotion and exhibition,¹ and over the past decade a small number of books have also started to appear.² But in comparison to work on other areas of film and cinema, distribution remains under-researched. Indeed, the term ‘distribution’ is often still perceived to refer simply to the physical means by which a film is transported from its distributor to an exhibitor.

Yet through their acquisitions policies, their promotional and marketing practices, and their links with production and exhibition, distributors play a crucial role in determining what we as audiences get to see and hence in helping to shape our film culture. If we are to understand more fully why we have the film culture we do – both historically and contemporaneously – we need to understand the factors that influence and shape the distribution process whereby some films are widely seen and others are not. This is particularly important if we are better to understand the range of factors that can work to restrict the diversity of our moving image culture.

Through a case study of the UK women’s distributor Cinenova, we want to draw attention to some of the often hidden factors that can impact on the distribution process and function to inhibit the realization of a more diverse moving image culture. Cinenova is one of a number of small specialist distributors that emerged in the UK (and elsewhere) with the specific aim of distributing work that has not interested conventional

- 1 For example, a chapter on ‘Distributing the product’, in Martyn Auty and Nick Roddick, *British Cinema Now* (London: British Film Institute, 1985) and a section on ‘Distribution and exhibition’, in Charlotte Brunsdon, *Films for Women* (London: British Film Institute, 1986).
- 2 For example, Tiitu Lukk, *Movie Marketing: Opening the Picture and Giving it Legs* (Los Angeles, CA: Silman-James Press, 1997), Peter Biskind, *Down and Dirty Pictures: Miramax, Sundance and the Rise of Independent Film* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004) and Scott MacDonald, *Canyon Cinema: the Life and Times of an Independent Film Distributor* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2008).

film distributors because the low level of financial return makes it largely economically unviable and certainly commercially uncompetitive: short films, experimental work, documentaries and some 'specialist' feature films. The logic of the mainstream industry pushes it to minimize risk, to compete for the largest possible market share and to prefer subjects of proven appeal. Even within the realm of the popular, this leads to a narrowing of economic focus towards what seem the surest bets, with 'blockbuster-sequelitis' and an obsession with the youth demographic the most obvious effects. The economically marginal, commercially uncompetitive or otherwise untried therefore relies on smaller, frequently specialist distributors who have committed to that *kind* of film.

Distributors such as Cinenova ensure that a wider range of moving-image material remains available to its potential audiences, however large or small they may be, and have worked to maintain and expand those audiences. Hence anything that impacts negatively on their ability to carry out their core distribution activity jeopardizes that distribution process and can function to restrict the diversity of our film culture.

This study is based on surviving documents from Cinenova and its funders, and post-hoc interviews with historical actors, including distribution staff, Management Committee members, and funders. These historical traces are not the past, and this is only one of the accounts that could be drawn from them. In particular, not all the cited historical actors agree about either the significance of feminist film practice or distribution as an activity, whereas this case study is a polemic in favour of both.

Cinenova's origins lay in the fate of its two predecessor organizations, Cinema of Women (COW) and Circles. Cinema of Women (set up in 1979) specialized in campaigning documentaries and theatrical release of contemporary feminist feature films, while Circles (set up in 1980) specialized in avant-garde material and historical titles. Together they played a crucial role in securing the visibility of, and audiences for, women's film and video in the UK via television sales, cinema releases, touring packages and hires/sales to the education sector and other institutional markets. And by the late 1980s the organizations had built up invaluable libraries of several hundred film and video titles. Although both organizations were initially dependent on volunteer labour, by the mid 1980s they had attracted considerable grant aid. In particular, because both COW and Circles were located in London they had been able to benefit from the Greater London Council's commitment to promote cultural diversity by supporting grassroots cultural production in the London region. As part of this policy, the GLC had identified an urgent need to intervene at the level of distribution since they had found that grassroots initiatives had 'been hampered by ineffective distribution and marketing and their inability to exploit their own successes'.³

When the GLC was abolished in 1986, the major responsibility for funding COW and Circles passed to the British Film Institute. However, by the end of the decade the BFI was itself faced with a reduced budget in

3 Greater London Council, *London Industrial Strategy: the Cultural Industries* (n.d.), p. 12.

- 4 Irene Whitehead, formerly of Funding and Development/Planning units, British Film Institute, in interview with Peter Thomas, 29 June 2004.

- 5 Lianne Harris, formerly of Circles/Cinenova, in interview with Julia Knight, 20 July 1991.
- 6 Helen de Witt and Kate Norrish, formerly of Cinenova, in interview with Julia Knight and Peter Thomas, 18 November 2004.

- 7 Cinema of Women and Circles, 'Summary notes from conversation with Tony Kirkhope 10 March' (1991).

the wake of funding cuts affecting the whole sector and was 'struggling ... in terms of its own overheads and activities'.⁴ In spring 1990 the BFI therefore informed Circles and COW that substantial cuts were being made to their revenue funding. Since the cuts were large enough to threaten their continued existence, the two organizations launched a high-profile press campaign to try and have the decision reversed. While the campaign was not entirely successful, the BFI did revise its approach to try and ensure the survival of one women's distributor. The options they offered were for Circles and COW to explore the possibility of merging or for the two organizations to essentially fight it out for the available funding. With the prospect of dwindling revenue funding in the future and an indication from the BFI of the availability of a three-year funding package for the surviving distributor, the two organizations pursued the former option. After more than a year of negotiation and uncertainty, however, the merger plans fell through. COW closed down while Circles relaunched in October 1991 under the new name Cinenova, with a business plan that took them from grant aid dependency to break-even and self-sustainability on earned income in four years.

Despite the difficulties of the preceding eighteen months and the challenges that lay ahead, the mood at Cinenova was initially buoyant and optimistic.⁵ In particular, production styles in women's work in the early 1990s were becoming more playful and entertaining, which seemed to open up the opportunity to take women's work to wider audiences.⁶ And throughout the 1990s there was clearly still interest in, and audiences for, women's film and video work, evidenced not least by the theatrical release of two of Cinenova's titles on central London screens, its turnover in 1995 substantially exceeding projections, a growing demand for its titles at film festivals worldwide and a sell-out event on women's filmmaking at London's Institute for Contemporary Arts.

However, by the late 1990s Cinenova was experiencing falling sales and had a mounting deficit. Although the workers managed to keep the deficit more or less under control, they could not reduce it, and in 2000 Cinenova was eventually forced to cease active trading. The following case-study identifies four interlinking factors which affected the distribution process and – despite the apparent interest in women's film and video work – undermined the organization's ability to conduct its core distribution activity: lack of commercial viability, under-resourcing, the relationship with funders, and a changing marketplace.

When Circles and COW tried to get the BFI to reverse its decision in 1990 to cut their funding, central to their argument for continuing to fund women's distribution was the fact that 'a proportion of the work would always be non-profit making', because there are relatively small audiences for certain types of work.⁷ Hence its distribution would always require subsidy. However, in 1993 the BFI estimated that it was subsidizing Cinenova at a rate of approximately £100 per film title and argued that in view of the funding cuts affecting the whole sector, such a

8 Stephen Bell, Acting Head of Exhibition and Distribution, British Film Institute, letter to Cinenova, 2 March 1993.

subsidy was too high for the level of activity. They insisted that ‘to have long-term viability [Cinenova] must be able to exist at a lower level of subsidy’.⁸ Although increasing earned income was written into Cinenova’s business plan, increasing it *significantly* – to the point where they could survive with a minimal level of subsidy – is something which has been very difficult for UK distributors like Cinenova to achieve.

Part of the problem for Cinenova (and similar distributors) was that the majority of its business consisted of small transactions which were labour-intensive to administer. While it was processing a considerable number of hires and sales across its whole catalogue, the prices it charged in comparison to other countries were relatively low and hence generated correspondingly low levels of income. Although the pricing structure covered the core distribution costs, it did not cover overheads such as salaries. But simply increasing the prices was not a viable option: significant markets for Cinenova’s titles were the education sector and screening venues, neither of which would sustain higher prices. This proved a point of friction with some US filmmakers who were interested in having their work distributed in the UK, but were conditioned by the US market to expect far higher returns than Cinenova could achieve for them. Indeed, as the VHS retail market took off, in the UK there was, if anything, an opposite tendency among distributors like Cinenova to *reduce* prices in an attempt to be competitive and widen the market for their titles.

This problem was exacerbated by the royalty split that Cinenova had inherited from Circles. Distributors like Circles and COW had been set up with a commitment to returning a substantial proportion of the hire and sale fees to their film/videomakers. The London Film-makers’ Co-op, for instance, started out returning seventy-five per cent to the filmmaker, but by the mid 1980s a fifty–fifty split on non-theatrical hires and sales was more or less the norm in the independent film and video sector. However, this was a much more favourable split for the filmmaker than that offered by commercial distributors. And it meant that Cinenova had to generate a substantial increase in the volume of hires and sales to produce anything more than a relatively small increase in net income for the distributor (that is, the distributor’s share after royalties have been deducted). On a fifty–fifty split this was never sufficient to cover the costs of the increased worker-time required to generate the increased volume of business in the first place. And it very quickly became apparent that, for an organization like Cinenova, any growth in earned income in fact results in the organization requiring more revenue funding, not less.

In order to address this problem in the face of dwindling grant aid, some distributors in the independent sector did eventually change their royalty split to sixty–forty in favour of the distributor. Although it was not always a popular measure with film/videomakers, the argument presented by the distributors was that it was better to receive a lower percentage of something and keep the distributor in business than to get

9 De Witt and Norrish interview, 2004.

10 Cinenova, Board Meeting minutes, 9 September 1992.

11 Whitehead interview, 2004.

fifty per cent of nothing if the distributor went out of business. However, while a small number on the Cinenova board supported such a change, other board members remained committed to its predecessors' founding principles. That, combined with the fact that Cinenova was a membership organization – whereby all filmmakers had voting rights at AGMs – meant that such changes were difficult to instigate and 'those quite momentous decisions weren't taken'.⁹ In the absence of additional grant aid to cover the costs of any increase in turnover, Cinenova became stuck in a classic 'growth-shrink' cycle: every time its turnover increased it did not have the financial resources to recruit additional staff to deal with the increased workload and hence it could not sustain the growth.

Furthermore, as Cinenova workers recognized very early on, much of the promotional work they undertook – to increase the visibility of the work they distributed and thereby to build up audiences for it – did not tend to generate income for the organization directly. But it still insisted it was nevertheless committed to 'promoting work by women' – as its byline declared – and felt that promotional work 'should therefore form the main part of our identity'.¹⁰ Hence, within twelve months of launching, Cinenova was also split by a fundamental contradiction: despite the apparent need to increase earned income urgently and significantly, worker-time was explicitly committed to supporting largely non-income-generating activities. It continued, for instance, to send work to film festivals worldwide, even though it usually did not receive payment for such screenings.

Unsurprisingly therefore, by the end of its first year of trading Cinenova was already failing to meet its targets for earned income. Indeed, while funders were insisting that their revenue clients had to exist at a lower level of subsidy, most were doubtful that any of their client organizations 'were going to have more than a five or six per cent upturn in income generation'.¹¹ Thus funders were also encouraging them to pursue other sources of funding and saw securing other forms of grant aid as equally crucial to an organization's long-term survival. Cinenova heeded this and did succeed in attracting funding from sources such as the National Lottery, the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund. But these funds were always for discrete projects (such as equipment facilities, training or events) and did not contribute directly towards developing the core distribution business of the organization or its self-sustainability. Indeed, on occasions it did just the reverse, since doing the funding applications in addition to the day-to-day running of the organization could actually increase staff costs as well as take away worker-time from maintaining the core distribution activity.

Because of the difficulty of raising the level of earned income, alongside dwindling grant aid, distributors like Cinenova were also faced with the problem of long-term under-resourcing. From the outset, Cinenova received less revenue funding than had been projected in the original business plan drawn up by COW and Circles. The justification

¹² Gill Henderson, on behalf of Circles Management Committee, letter to COW, 30 April 1991.

¹³ Whitehead interview, 2004.

¹⁴ Laura Hudson, in interview with Julia Knight and Peter Thomas, 19 November 2004.

¹⁵ Margaret Trotter, formerly Cinenova Management Board, in interview with Julia Knight, 23 June 2004.

¹⁶ De Witt and Norrish, interview, 2004.

for the lower level of funding was that the BFI was far from convinced that Cinenova could achieve the shift to self-sufficiency detailed in the plan. One of its main concerns was that the projected income figures were unrealistically high.¹² According to Irene Whitehead, one of the BFI staff responsible for the continued funding of Cinenova, it ‘was more a gesture of goodwill rather than a kind of acceptance that all was going to be well with them’.¹³ Thus Cinenova was able to offer only fairly low levels of pay – £10,400 per annum in 1993 – and it did not always cover the cost of full-time employment for the workers. Frequently workers would be employed for only four days a week, although they often worked additional unpaid hours in order to manage the workload. By the late 1990s one worker was paid £15,000 per annum, but reported regularly working ninety hours per week.¹⁴ Hence Cinenova – like so many other organizations in the sector – was permanently under-resourced and this had a serious impact on its ability to recruit and retain an effective team of staff.

The low salary levels meant it was difficult to recruit workers with the necessary business skills and experience to develop the organization. Rather, the organization tended to attract creative practitioners or people with a passion for and knowledge of women’s film/video work who were college-leavers or at a fairly early stage in their careers. Hence they were usually lacking the necessary contacts to tap into the television sales market, exploit European funding deals or negotiate sub-distribution contracts, for instance.¹⁵ And over the years, when the jobs were advertised they attracted fewer and fewer applicants. Partly due to this difficulty in recruiting staff and partly as a cost-saving measure, there was on a couple of occasions a delay of several months in recruiting a replacement when someone left, leaving one worker to run the entire organization. These factors, combined with a lack of employment benefits and ageing office technology, meant that throughout Cinenova’s history there was also a relatively high turnover of staff. Indeed, within a couple of years of Cinenova launching, none of the original staff – the workers who had experienced the BFI’s demands for greater self-sustainability and helped devise the original business plan – was still there.

These difficulties in both recruiting and retaining staff resulted in not only a growing backlog of work, but also the need to ‘keep reinventing the wheel’, as it were, in terms of running the organization. That is, there was never a long-term accumulation of skills, experience and expertise from which the organization could grow and develop. As each new set of workers learnt the business, they came to the same conclusions about the difficulties they faced and reiterated the same priorities as their predecessors, but either did not stay long enough to significantly advance those priorities or burnt themselves out within three to four years trying to achieve them with too few resources. In addition, Cinenova’s under-resourcing also meant that the organization could not always respond adequately to its customer needs and, as one former worker observed, ‘that affects your reputation’.¹⁶

Cinenova's enduring problem with under-resourcing was exacerbated by the relationship with its main funder. In the 1980s, film and video organizations in the UK's independent sector tended to become heavily dependent on one major revenue funder – a situation which was reinforced by the fact that the funders themselves tended to be quite territorial about their portfolio of clients. This relationship of dependency allowed funders to impose their own terms and priorities on their client organizations as a condition of funding. Indeed, it is evident from some correspondence that revenue funders would at times adopt quite an authoritarian attitude in their dealings with their client organizations. As a result, the issue for Cinenova and similar organizations was not simply whether they were successful or not in getting funding, but also managing the relationship with their principal funder when they were. And there are at least two moments in the history of women's film and video distribution in the UK when managing this relationship had a significant impact on the organization's ability to operate effectively.

The first comes in Cinenova's prehistory, during the negotiations with the BFI in 1990. As late as August of that year, Circles and COW were still looking at the possibility of salvaging both organizations, but the BFI made Circles' receipt of a bridging grant conditional upon its undertaking a consultancy with COW to produce a business plan for a single new organization.¹⁷ Circles and COW therefore gave up the idea of trying to save both organizations and came up with the required business plan for a new company – provisionally called Take Two – which as its name suggests was based on the combined staff expertise and catalogues of the two existing organizations. In late March 1991, after the business plan had gone through various revisions at the BFI's request, the BFI made a provisional offer of £45,000 to COW and Circles 'towards establishing and operating Take Two in 1991–92'.¹⁸ However, it appears that in early April 1991 the BFI shifted from dealing jointly with COW and Circles in these discussions to dealing solely with Circles. And the outcome was that by late April 1991, rather than awarding the £45,000 to the two organizations jointly, Circles had received confirmation from the BFI of £30,000 revenue funding for the new organization for the financial year 1991–92,¹⁹ while COW was offered £15,000 to wind-up and instructed to pack up and deliver its files to the BFI.²⁰

This exclusion of COW from the final planning stages was handled in such a way that it caused a serious rift between the two women's distributors, with considerable hard feelings on the part of COW's workers.²¹ The loss of COW's goodwill deprived the new organization of both COW's experience of theatrical distribution and the straightforward acquisition of COW's library of films, together with the income they would generate.²² Consequently, when it finally launched, Cinenova spent considerable time trying to sort out the acquisition of COW's titles, not always with success. According to Irene Whitehead, who had been responsible for funding both groups in the late 1980s, it also meant that the stronger organization – in terms of surviving in the new funding

¹⁷ Ian Christie, British Film Institute, letter to Circles, 13 August 1990.

¹⁸ Ian Christie and Irene Whitehead, British Film Institute, letter to COW and Circles, 25 March 1991.

¹⁹ Ian Christie and Irene Whitehead, British Film Institute, letter to Take Two, c/o Circles, 23 April 1991.

²⁰ Abina Manning and Jenny Shabbaz Wallace, COW, letter to Circles Management Committee, 23 April 1991.

²¹ This is documented in the exchange of letters between Henderson (1991) and Manning and Wallace (1991).

²² Both Helen de Witt and Debra Zimmerman of Women Make Movies have stressed the significance of Cinenova's loss of the COW catalogue and have suggested that if a merger had taken place there would have been a higher likelihood of Cinenova succeeding because of the strength of COW's catalogue. E-mail correspondence with Julia Knight, December 2006.

²³ Whitehead, interview, 2004.

²⁴ London Film and Video Development Agency, fax to Cinenova regarding 'Cinenova Assessment/Review', 28 January 1994.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Cinenova, Board Meeting minutes, 20 December 1995.

climate – was closed down. Although Circles was probably more 'culturally effective', she has asserted that '[COW] were more practical . . . they had a greater business sense than Circles and had a better grasp of management and accounting'.²³

The second moment came two years later, after the BFI had passed funding responsibility for Cinenova over to the London Film and Video Development Agency. In January 1994 the LFDVA informed Cinenova it was going to undertake an 'assessment/review' of its activities. According to the LFDVA the purpose of the review was 'to work with Cinenova in a detailed and systematic way to look at its policies, operations and plans for the future' with a view to agreeing priorities and examining the resource implications thereof.²⁴ Although Cinenova initially saw it as an opportunity to establish a firm relationship with the LFDVA and felt it could prove very fruitful, it nevertheless embroiled the new organization in a number of additional activities. Cinenova staff were, for instance, required to attend a whole series of meetings – seven over an eight-month period – and undertake various review processes, including producing a thirty-plus-page report on Cinenova's activities. Cinenova was also explicitly reminded that LFDVA policies formed part of the background to the review: 'Of special relevance here is of course the LFDVA's exhibition policy. In particular the criteria for funding should be borne in mind.'²⁵ As part of the review process, Cinenova therefore also produced a twenty-page development prospectus detailing various income-generating activities it had researched and costed. Most of these were – unsurprisingly – aimed at increasing the exhibition of women's work and focused on television sales, touring packages, submitting work to film festivals and doing showcase screenings at central London venues. Accompanying the prospectus was a request for just under £25,000 of development funding to undertake the initiatives – in addition to its normal core activities – and take it to self-sufficiency in two to three years. Although it is debatable whether the exhibitions initiatives could have become self-sustaining, the LFDVA accepted the prospectus and ended up structuring the review process around it.²⁶ Yet when complete, the review resulted in only a very small increase in Cinenova's revenue funding for 1994–95, with the request for development funding ignored.

The activity of dealing with the funder in both these instances lasted for around a year, and not only added significantly to employees' workloads but also drained the organization and its workers of energy. This in turn meant the core distribution activity became neglected and resulted in a backlog of work which seriously impacted on Cinenova's ability to operate effectively.

Furthermore, for Cinenova, as for other granted-aided organizations, this process of managing the relationship with the funder significantly affected its sense of identity. As already mentioned, Circles and COW had initially been interested in trying to keep both organizations going, as they had evolved fairly distinct and separate identities. Yet, in the

business plan for the new company, in order to make themselves eligible for the available funding, COW and Circles argued that the distinctions between the two old organizations were now less marked, and they discussed the benefits of having one merged organization. Thus it is hardly surprising that within a year of opening for business, Cinenova workers wrote to their board to call an ‘emergency’ meeting because, as they asserted:

[There is] an overwhelming sense that Cinenova lacks direction. We feel that . . . we have lost sight of what our objectives are. This makes most of the projects we’re working on and any promotion we do about the company itself a nebulous task. Basically our energy is drained from this.²⁷

²⁷ Liane Harris, Cinenova, letter to Cinenova Board members, 2 August 1992.

The overall effect of its dependency on one major revenue funder, therefore, was that Cinenova started from a much weaker position than originally envisaged and was far less well-equipped in terms of resources, energy and identity in its crucial early years of trading, affecting its ability to carry out its core distribution activity and build itself a strong position in the marketplace.

While audiences for women’s work still existed in the 1990s and, if anything, more women were making work, Cinenova’s weakened position was compounded by the nature of the marketplace that the organization was entering – which was very different to the one in which its predecessors had operated. In the 1980s many women filmmakers had been keen to place their work with COW or Circles both as an act of support for a feminist initiative and because the distributors undertook to secure appropriate audiences for the work; hence the organizations had enjoyed a good supply of material to distribute. At the same time, COW and Circles had also been able to rely on an extensive and committed network of women’s groups as a core audience for the work they distributed, as well as a number of supportive screening venues. As early 1980s feminist film/video maker and activist Judith Higginbottom has explained, due to the take-up of feminism in a wide range of areas and its analysis of the world in terms of patriarchy: ‘There was a natural audience [of women] which was very hungry for films by women’.²⁸ In the mid 1980s Higginbottom worked with Circles to programme regional tours of Maya Deren’s work, and experienced first-hand the range of interested groups and venues. But by the 1990s this supportive environment had started to break up.

As early as 1990 women film and video makers had started to resist the ‘feminist’ label and question the benefits of categorizing cultural products made by women on the basis of the gender of their producers. Cate Elwes has also argued that in the course of the 1990s younger women, who had not experienced the feminist debates of the 1970s first-hand, became more interested in pursuing professional recognition and career success than in supporting a feminist agenda.²⁹ While Cinenova had been optimistic in 1991 about the future, these shifts in attitude made

²⁸ Judith Higginbottom, formerly of South West Arts/South West Media Development Agency, in interview with Chris Rodrigues and Peter Thomas, 5 December 2003.

²⁹ Catherine Elwes, *Video Loupe* (London: KT Press, 2000), pp. 10–11.

30 De Witt and Norrish, interview, 2004.

a significant proportion of women rather reluctant to place their work with a women's distributor. A notable exception were the lesbian filmmakers; according to one worker, 'without lesbian work and demand for it, Cinenova would have been in a much more difficult position'.³⁰ However, whilst this developing market certainly eased Cinenova's difficulties, it was not sufficient to sustain it.

In addition, the women's groups who had been keen to hire the work distributed by Circles and COW had also started to experience funding cuts by the end of the 1980s. As Laura Hudson, a former Cinenova worker, has observed:

What happened in the late 1980s and most of the 1990s is that people *think* that the fight [against patriarchy] has been won, and there's no longer any need to redress the balance. Unfortunately that's not really the case, but the funders' priorities have changed and shifted and they're no longer going to put money into something that is a women's cause.³¹

31 Hudson, interview, 2004.

As a result, the women's groups either disappeared or started to request discounted hire rates that Cinenova could ill afford to support. At the same time, by the early 1990s venues were being required to become more economically self-sustaining and were thus far less inclined to programme material they deemed financially 'risky'. When Hudson worked at Cinenova in the late 1990s, she also noticed that educational sales were declining and undertook a survey to find out why. Although she observes that there were a number of reasons, she asserts that 'a lot of it was because the people who were choosing films and teaching the film courses were male', and that many film studies courses had lost their feminist component. Thus Cinenova was less able than COW and Circles had been – even with the growing lesbian audience – to capitalize on a substantial pre-existing audience who were 'hungry' for the work it distributed.

Cinenova's ability to deal with the changed environment was also hampered by the feminist distribution practice it had inherited from its predecessors. Both COW and Circles had been set up to ensure distribution opportunities existed for film and video directed by women, which spoke 'from or about the position of women'.³² As the successor organization, Cinenova not only inherited this commitment, but – as the sole surviving women's distributor in the UK – felt the need to promote as far as was possible the full range and diversity of women's film and video work. However, while Cinenova did indeed ensure a wide range of historical and contemporary moving image work by women was available, many of the titles in its catalogue were only rarely, if ever, hired or bought. To a certain extent, this is a fact of moving image distribution. As Debra Zimmerman of Women Make Movies explains: 'Every year, whatever we do, ten per cent or twenty per cent of the films in the collection are going to make eighty per cent of the money'.³³

32 Quoted in Julia Knight, 'Cinenova – a sign of the times', *Screen*, vol. 33, no. 2 (1992), p. 185.

33 Debra Zimmerman, in interview with Peter Thomas, 25 July 2005.

Many distributors will therefore concentrate on actively promoting only their more popular titles, consigning others to an archive collection and de-acquiring those that have become outdated due to political change or that do not stand the test of time. While such commercially-minded strategies were discussed on a number of occasions at Cinenova, however, they were never pursued. One of the main reasons for this was that if the titles that did not shift in significant quantities were archived or de-acquired, they would effectively cease to be both visible and available in the UK; thus a substantial part of feminist film history – however outdated the work appeared to be – would effectively disappear. In view of the reasons why COW and Circles were set up, such a course would, at least in part, have undermined the *raison d'être* of a women's distributor and – given the remaining commitment to COW's and Circles' founding principles – was ultimately unpalatable.

Thus on the one hand, the organization was less able to rely on a good supply of contemporary material to distribute, which left it with a collection of work that was becoming increasingly outdated and hence difficult to promote. And on the other, it was confronted with a marked decline in two of its historically strongest markets but lacked the resources to develop new ones.

To have had a chance of making its existence less fragile, Cinenova would have needed to become a very different organization. Although its continuing commitment to the feminist goals of its predecessor organizations inhibited that possibility to a certain degree, Whitehead has argued that London-based organizations in particular had in some ways little incentive to change. She asserts that the generous funding policies of the GLC had 'built up a whole level of expectation' among their client organizations with regard to their entitlement to be funded which was 'quite unreal'.³⁴ Although Cinenova was fully aware of the BFI's insistence that it move 'towards financial independence',³⁵ Whitehead argues the GLC's policies bequeathed a legacy whereby funded groups were unwilling to face up fully to the changed environment and the reality of permanent funding cuts. However, she also concedes – with the gift of hindsight – that funding agencies should have done more to help organizations adjust.³⁶

Yet subsidized groups like Cinenova were normally funded specifically for their ideological 'baggage', not at all for their financial strength, and saw funding as a recognition of their campaigns' importance. As such, they frequently treated threatened cuts and admonitions to become self-supporting as reversible if their campaigning mandate could be forcibly restated, or redescribed in the language of contemporary funding targets. That surviving comparable groups became more, not less, heavily subsidized through the 1990s, and that Cinenova itself received significant Lottery funding late in the decade, suggests some validity to this, as does contemporary funding agencies' continued emphasis on the need to build diversity.³⁷

- 34 Whitehead, interview, 2004. Felicity Sparrow, formerly of London Filmmakers' Co-operative, Circles and Greater London Arts, also made a similar point in interview with Julia Knight and Peter Thomas, 24 June 2004.
- 35 Liane Harris and Sarah Bratby, Circles, Letter to Circles' Filmmakers, April 1991.
- 36 Whitehead, interview, 2004.

- 37 See the UK Film Council's account of one of its 'key policy priorities'. URL: <http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/diversity> [accessed 21 June 2008].

While the above is not a completely comprehensive analysis of the factors that impacted on Cinenova's ability to undertake its core distribution activity, it is nevertheless evident that the four interlinking factors identified and discussed above – the lack of commercial viability, under-resourcing, the relationship with funders, a changing marketplace – jeopardized the distribution process and in turn functioned to limit the range of work that was reaching audiences. It is also evident that the very existence of 'specialist' distributors like Cinenova is highly fragile and in the UK has always been dependent upon some form of subsidy (whether that is grant aid, low pay, volunteer labour or some combination of all three). Cinenova, for instance, continued to receive revenue funding until 2000 and only continues to exist through the commitment of a small team of volunteers. While part of Cinenova's history is very much shaped by its feminist heritage, similar difficulties faced other independent sector distributors, such as London Filmmakers' Co-op, London Electronic Arts and Albany Video Distribution, and very few have survived.

Although digital technology is frequently perceived to alleviate some of the problems of traditional independent film and video distribution, the factors discussed above with specific reference to Cinenova have not simply evaporated. Even with the ease of online ordering, promotion and marketing, the Lux, for instance, acknowledges that it remains heavily dependent on one major funder, still has to deal with the problem of under-resourcing and relies on the support of a team of volunteer interns.³⁸ Thus the factors that can inhibit the realization of a more diverse moving image culture continue to persist and continue to shape that culture.

This research note is based on research carried out as part of an AHRC-funded three-year project (2002–05) examining independent/artists' film and video distribution in the UK from 1970 to date. Further information about the project and its findings are detailed at URL: <http://alt-fv-distribution.net>.

³⁸ Ben Cook, in interview with Julia Knight, 24 February 2004.

- 1 *The Soundtrack*, a journal created in 2008 and edited by Stephen Deutsch, Larry Sider and Dominic Power, stresses that the music, dialogue, effects and atmospheres tracks form a 'coherent entity', 'analogous perhaps to the strings, brass, woodwind and percussion in an orchestra'. One of the essays in its first issue is devoted to interactive media. The online *Journal of Music and the Moving Image*, edited by Gillian Anderson and Ron Sadoff, 'is dedicated to the relationship between the entire universe of music and moving images (film, television, music videos, computer games, performance art, and web-based media)'. *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image*, edited by Anahid Kassabian and Ian Gardiner, embraces a wide range of media and critical methodologies and is available in print and online.

William Whittington, *Sound Design and Science Fiction*. Austin, TX: University of Austin Texas Press, 2007, 280 pp.

Robert Spadoni, *Uncanny Bodies: the Coming of Sound Film and the Origins of the Horror Genre*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, and London: University of California Press, 2007, 190 pp.

ELISABETH WEIS

The field of film sound studies is evolving rapidly. Is it being subsumed into a broader area called 'sound studies'? Judging from presentations at academic conferences, the majority of graduate students in the field are now analyzing new media, while three brand new journals on music and the moving image are, quite properly, inviting contributions that address the broadest definition of audiovisual media.¹ However, two scholars have demonstrated that there is still a lot to learn about sound in film *per se*. Their recent books offer complementary approaches to studies of sound and genre: *Sound Design and Science Fiction* uses one genre to vastly expand our knowledge about film sound, while *Uncanny Bodies* uses early sound history to expand our understanding of one genre.

Sound Design is a major achievement in film studies that should be widely read as a general introduction to the underappreciated art and practice of sound. Whittington makes a compelling case for the centrality of sound to the modern Hollywood aesthetic. While surveying the evolution of sound technology, post-production practices and design in seminal science-fiction films of the last forty years, he concurrently provides a comprehensive introduction to the various components of the soundtrack and how they create meaning. He carefully defines terms such as Foley and source music not just in a glossary but as they arise, in such a way that the book can serve as a textbook on sound design in general, not just on the one genre. Students who prefer that their instruction not be embedded in the language and context of current academic thought will

2 See: David Sonnenschein, *Sound Design: the Expressive Power of Music, Voice, and Sound Effects in Cinema* (Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2001). See also Sven E. Carlsson's comprehensive and invaluable website on sound design. URL: <http://www.Filmsound.org> [accessed 21 June 2008].

probably be more comfortable with a textbook written by an industry professional.²

Why focus on science fiction? According to Whittington, the genre is historically the site of sonic innovation, with thematic concerns that incorporate sonic considerations within the 'narrative dynamics' of the films. For example, the deployment of ambience in surround sound speakers addresses the construction of (both cinematic and theatrical) space, which 'intersects with iconography, locale, and thematic concerns of the genre' (p. 95). Thus, says Whittington, surround sound puts the filmgoer in the position of asking 'where am I?', in not just the literal but the metaphysical sense. Another trope central to science fiction is the definition of being human. Sound is often used to examine the tension between the human and the mechanical. To convey the point where the distinctions blur, machines may be given anthropomorphic screams and androids given heartbeats, while humans may be associated with metallic sound effects and imagery.

Whittington spends considerable time on audience reception. For him, science-fiction blockbusters are not just visual but sonic spectacles that have 'recalibrated' audience expectations for sound as well as image, and today's audience takes pleasure in recognizing that some sound is constructed. However, he overstates his case when he claims that 'filmmakers and filmgoers alike are no longer satisfied with sound that is subservient to the image' (p. 195). Certainly today's filmgoers want to be immersed at home and at the theatre in an ocean of sound, but they usually still expect sound to flesh out what they are watching. And, alas, most filmgoers do not appreciate the distinction between over-modulated clamour and the subtle layering, placement and orchestration of sound design at its best.

The book is organized chronologically, with most of the historical chapters followed by exemplary case-studies of seminal films. Whittington traces several major phases. As he sees it, during the late 1960s, the film-school generation of directors was influenced by the formal experimental approaches of European art filmmakers like Jean-Luc Godard and Chris Marker, who challenged traditional image-sound relations, often foregrounding elements other than speech. For instance, in *THX 1138* (1971), George Lucas and Walter Murch experimented with audio fragmentation and multilayered tracks in ways that helped develop that film's themes of oppression and repression. *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977) – for which Ben Burtt was given an unprecedented full year to create specific sounds – marked a major paradigm shift into a more commercial sound style that integrated sound within the narrative but also emphasized sonic grandeur. Further, in a practice that is much more common and easy with today's digital equipment, sound and music were integrated and sometimes fused in function. My favourite of Whittington's examples is how Burtt pitched Obi-Wan Kenobi's light sabre in a C major chord while Darth Vader's is in a minor key (p. 109). Finally, Whittington discusses the digital revolution in sound design,

using the *Matrix* franchise to expand his examination to include sound design in media such as DVD and computer games.

As Whittington explains the nature of the final mix, he posits some fascinating tensions in blockbuster science-fiction films. Traditionally, the mix and pre-mixes had been used not only to balance the voice, effects and music (with the voice dominating), but also to smooth out anything, such as disparities in background levels under speech, that would draw attention to the soundtrack. But with today's audiences expecting sonic as well as visual spectacle, the mix also provides opportunities to showcase the possibilities of sound. Moreover, the sound designers must evoke a sense of the fantastic at the same time as their effects impart solidity and verisimilitude to invented or CGI objects or characters, so that we accept their existence.

The filmgoer's feeling that something is simultaneously real and unreal is at the very centre of Spadoni's work. *Uncanny Bodies* positions two canonical horror films of 1931, Tod Browning's *Dracula* and James Whale's *Frankenstein*, within the context of the contemporary audience's response to the introduction of talkies. Spadoni argues that certain aesthetic practices related to the audience's response to the earliest sound films remain embedded in subsequent horror films as conventions. He attributes his approach to stylistic analysis in part to an article by Tom Gunning who recommended that we should look more closely at those formal characteristics of a genre that are unique to film language (that is, at cinematic as well as narrational conventions of a genre).³ That approach would have been even more persuasive had Spadoni extended his very brief final chapter to include the conventions of more horror films beyond the early and mid thirties.

The chief methodology of the book, and its greatest strength, is reception study, modeled on Yuri Tsivian's approach in *Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception*.⁴ Tsivian argued that in addition to reading contemporary secondary sources that conveyed reactions to films of a given time, one could infer generalized audience responses by examining the films' formal attributes. Spadoni's main contribution to sound studies is his postulation that the transition to sound evoked in audiences the same awareness of the medium that they felt when the first silent films were viewed – an awareness of artifice that the viewers projected onto the diegetic world of the film. He argues that although sound eventually added a sense of reality to the screen image, the earliest talkies were estranging, given such initial difficulties as the unnatural quality of the voice, the rudimentary state of sound editing and the seemingly unrealistic placement of loudspeakers in the theatre.

Further, Spadoni contends that the earliest sound films evoked in their viewers a disquieting sense that the bodies on screen were both alive and not alive, that they were 'talking shadows'. He defines this sensation as the uncanny, using Freud's adaptation of Ernst Jentsch's idea to convey the unsettling reaction of perceiving something as alive and then suddenly perceiving it as not. In Spadoni's view, 'Something vital had been added

3 "Those drawn with a very fine camel's hair brush": the origin of film genres', *iris*, no. 20 (Autumn 1995), pp. 49-60.

4 Yuri Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception*, trans. Alan Bolger (London: Routledge, 1994).

along with the sound, but also something vital had been leached away. Figures now seemed more vivid and animated, and yet, paradoxically, they did not necessarily seem more alive. In fact, with luminously pale skin and with voices that could be reedy and hollow-sounding, these figures now could seem distinctly less alive than before' (p. 22).

Dracula, released in February 1931, near the end of the transition to sound, evoked in its viewers that initial unreality. While Bela Lugosi's bass tonality, slowed-down pronunciation and thick Hungarian accent reproduced his stage performance of the play on which the film was based, these vocal qualities, according to Spadoni, also evoked the quality of film speech at the very start of the sound period: 'The weird textures of Dracula's speech enfold his visual form in a way that calls to mind figures in earlier sound films whose slow and unreal-sounding speech could trigger perceptions of their bodies as ghostly or corpse-like' (p. 66).

Even more than its sound style, it was the film's visual style, especially the depiction of the vampire – Dracula's slow movements, costuming and pale makeup – and the visual flatness of the mise-en-scene that especially evoked the sense of uncanniness Spadoni attributes to earlier sound films. Indeed, although Lugosi's vocal patterns 'would set the standard for what a "voice of horror" should sound like', it is the visuals more than the sounds, that, according to Spadoni, were permanently affected by the way horror films responded to the transition to sound (p. 63).

Spadoni argues that filmgoers' 'medium sensitivity' at the start of the sound era to cinema's mechanical nature dissipated significantly during the ten-month period after *Dracula*'s release. To him, *Frankenstein*, which appeared in November 1931, was much less dependent on viewers' recent memories of transition films and instead evoked a different, and more lasting, uncanny effect. Spadoni writes that with the audience losing its initial shocked response to sound film by late 1931, '*Frankenstein* is aggressively co-opting effects that its predecessor *Dracula* also managed, and doing so in ways that would be of greater use to horror filmmakers for a longer period of time' (p. 103). However, *Frankenstein* evoked the uncanny effect not only of early sound film but, even more, that of silent film. Most obviously, whereas Count Dracula's voice evoked the slow cadences of early sound speech, the Frankenstein monster could grunt but not talk (p. 112).

The book's thesis is developed rigorously. Spadoni builds each claim on the previous one and provides examples either from close readings of the films themselves or from an impressive array of secondary sources of the time. He then recapitulates each idea before developing the next point. The downside of this writing style is considerable redundancy. The upside is clarity and logic.

My bias is showing; both books' approaches to sound and genre are highly valuable, and both are supported by superb scholarship. But given all the brilliant research that has been devoted to the transition to sound, I am particularly excited that Whittington has chosen to focus on more recent developments.

Laura Mulvey and Jamie Sexton (eds), *Experimental British Television*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007, 215 pp.

JASON JACOBS

As Laura Mulvey notes in her introduction, ‘experimental television’ might seem to be an oxymoron but, as the essays in this fascinating collection demonstrate, the aspiration to experiment, innovate and challenge constitutes a significant dimension of television production throughout its history. Whether such aspirations were successfully fulfilled is a matter this book is less concerned with; instead we have essays that explore a range of creative ambition in television across several decades. The coverage is limited to British television from the 1960s to the late 1990s with most attention given to arts documentaries and drama. This national and generic focus is actually useful since it provides a concentrated sense of developing debates in television aesthetics. Mulvey and her coeditor Jamie Sexton have done a fine job in ordering the material so that the reader steadily accumulates a deeper understanding of the development of the relevant aesthetic discourses (and their institutional and technological contexts) that informed much of what counted as ‘experimental’.

John Hill’s two contributions to the collection are a good example of this strategic ordering. His first is an account of the short-lived Langham Group, a team of drama producers, designers and technicians set up at the BBC in 1959 as a kind of research unit that was tasked with exploring new forms of televisual expression. The insistence of the group on developing television as a primarily visual medium was unsurprising given what must have been a pressing need to unshackle television from the notion, shared by many in BBC broadcasting, of it being merely ‘radio with pictures’. Although the group concentrated on visual innovation, particularly in terms of framing (for example, concentrating

1 Troy Kennedy Martin, 'Nats go home: first statement of a new drama for television', *Encore*, no. 48 (March-April, 1964).

on two pairs of legs during a dialogue scene) and editing, sound was also used to obtain unconventional effects. For example, the leading figure in the group, Anthony Péliissier, recruited Charles Parker to work on the soundtrack for his production of *The Torrents of Spring* (BBC, 1959) in which a mixture of children's song, instrumental music and other effects were used 'to add an extra level of aural montage' (p. 23).

Hill's second essay concerns *Diary of a Young Man* (BBC, 1964) written by Troy Kennedy Martin and standing as a kind of illustration of his manifesto of the same year, 'Nats Go Home!'.¹ As with the Langham Group, Kennedy Martin was eager to break with past habits of televisual representation and sought to introduce a range of unconventional visual and aural innovations into his drama. Hill provides a detailed interrogation of this ambition, noting the idiosyncratic nature of Martin's rejection of television naturalism, which seemed to condense a critique of the theatrical approach to television with a paradoxical but complex appropriation of Brecht. Kennedy Martin also shared with the Langham Group an attraction to the ideas and practice of Soviet montage, especially the work of Eisenstein.

Certainly there is evidence here, as Mulvey puts it, of 'the tendency for those interested in radical politics also to be interested in radical aesthetics' (p. 5). Brett Mills's chapter on Chris Morris's *Brass Eye* (Channel 4, 1997, 2001) claims that comedy programming has 'failed to escape the theatrical roots that formed the assumptions upon which most television is founded' (p. 183), whereas Morris's work with its extremes of formal and stylistic parody demolishes the aesthetic distinctions between serious news and comedy, and for Mills this is indicative of the show's progressive 'social purpose', including its aspiration to stimulate public debate about matters such as the reporting of paedophilia (pp. 191–2). Lez Cooke's essay on John McGrath's *The Adventures of Frank* (BBC, 1980), extends the coverage of the issues raised by Hill, and demonstrates the powerful and continuing influence of Brecht on the critical and political imagination of radicals during the 1970s and beyond.

Indeed, despite attempts to police the boundaries of the purely televisual, the evidence of this collection makes clear how productive the cross-fertilization of the arts can be: theatre, film, literature, music and their radical stylistic and aesthetic combinations influence and characterize many of the works discussed. Hill's essays on BBC drama are bridged by Helen Wheatley's revisionist reading of ITV's drama production in the 1960s, in which she examines the ways in which *Armchair Mystery Theatre* (ABC, 1960–65) draws on the stylistic tropes of French Impressionist cinema, the result being something she dubs 'tele-impressionism'. For all the interest in the specifically televisual there was, it seems, a fair amount of aspiration towards the cinematic, but the results as Wheatley vividly describes them are a fascinating blend of the two, with live television, at the limits of its technological ability, pursuing cinematic style.

Kay Dickinson's essay on Ken Russell's *Monitor* (BBC, 1958–65) and other films also stresses the productive interaction of television and other art forms. *Monitor*'s editor and anchorman Huw Wheldon provided the voiceover for Russell's acclaimed documentaries on composers. Appropriately enough, sound as much as image played a key role in Russell's subversion of Wheldon's conventional narration. In 'Elgar', Wheldon talks over the music in a way that imposes a BBC paternal address over Russell's careful juxtaposition of sound and image; in his later 'Bartok' film, Russell mixes the music at a higher level in order to subdue or at least challenge the intrusive presence of Wheldon's voice. This chapter is complemented by Sexton's history of the arts documentary which focuses on ITV's reaction to the BBC's *Monitor* format, *Tempo* (ABC, 1961–67) and the much more radical *New Tempo* (ABC, 1967), which drew on pop art, McLuhan and portable 16mm film technology in order to foreground the determining structures of culture and society in the production of art rather than the individual creative genius.

The serial form already established by popular fiction in print and then radio was also recruited for experimental ends by television. Catrin Prys, in her excellent account of *The Singing Detective* (BBC, 1986) argues that the radical potential of the serial form was fully exploited by Dennis Potter in order to open up a dense web of meaning anchored to evocative patterns of repetition, rhyme and cultural resonance over its six-week transmission. In an eloquent conclusion, Prys claims that the serial 'ceaselessly attempts to suggest the endless possibility and potential of human memory, creativity and interpretation' (p. 133).

John Ellis draws on his experience as a producer of *Visions* for Channel 4 in the early 1980s, and echoes Prys's stress on the importance of repetition. Noting that *Visions* struggled to establish an audience because it never secured a regular place in the schedules, he observes that 'the length and regularity of a series . . . enables experiment to take place and to be noticed as such' (p. 145). Perhaps because of his experience in the industry, Ellis seems slightly more wary of claims of experimental achievement than the other contributors, and it is true that some descriptions of the actual texts do not quite match up to the claims of radical experiment and innovation assigned to them.

The final essays in the collection are about more recent forms of experimentation. A.L. Rees offers a comprehensive account of the work of UK artists' film on television, and Kevin Donnelly's chapter on music video consolidates the collection's attention to sound with an account of the development of the pop promo and its relationship to technological innovations such as the Quantel Paintbox. As Donnelly astutely points out: 'Considerations of television still suffer from ocular-centric assumptions that prioritize the image despite the fact that television has always been an audio-visual medium, often having a close relationship with its cousin, the radio' (p. 166). And, continuing the theme of the

blending of media arts, he points to the emergence of mashup pop promos on the internet where the hierarchy of music and image is put into question.

This is a superb collection of scholarship that exemplifies the current density of expertise on British television history while stimulating and developing the growing interest in the history of television aesthetics.

Kathryn Kalinak, *How the West Was Sung: Music in the Westerns of John Ford*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2007, 256 pp.

EDWARD BUSCOMBE

If the Western has now retreated to the margins of contemporary film production, Kathryn Kalinak's book is evidence that there is still much to be learned about what was once Hollywood's most important genre. No one who knows John Ford's work could be in any doubt of the centrality of music, but until now there has been no detailed study of it. All of what Kalinak has discovered is interesting, and some of it surprising.

Her fundamental premiss is that within Ford's work the music is never merely decorative but carries important ideological meanings. The songs which are woven into the scores of the films often have a long and complex history. Though some songs were written especially for his films, Ford (whose influence on the scores was usually decisive) generally chose songs which were traditional and largely in the public domain. This of course had a beneficial side-effect of minimizing any copyright payments, but it also meant that the music was able to mobilize a rich cultural history.

One of the most complex instances that Kalinak explores comes in *The Searchers* (1956). Some critics, most notably Brian Henderson, have argued that the film offers a commentary, admittedly an oblique one, on the civil rights movement of the mid 1950s. Kalinak finds evidence for this in two tunes which are played during the wedding sequence, 'The Yellow Rose of Texas' and 'Jubilo'. Both these songs have their origins in minstrelsy. The first was originally about a mulatta; in the Civil War period the words were changed in order to obscure this fact, thus rendering it possible for the song to become a favourite of

Confederate troops. It is this connotation of the song which permits it to function in the film as a trigger for what Kalinak calls 'a diffused melancholy for the antebellum South' (p. 180). But the reference in the earlier version of the song to a woman of colour cannot be entirely suppressed. Nor can the minstrel origins of 'Jubilo' be ignored. Composed in 1862, it was 'deliberately created to further the cause of abolition' (p. 179) and was used to make a political point both in *The Horse Soldiers*, Ford's 1959 Civil War film, and in *Sergeant Rutledge* (1960), about black troops fighting Indians out west. Placing 'Jubilo' and 'The Yellow Rose of Texas' together in the wedding sequence of *The Searchers* is thus a kind of balancing act between pro- and anti-Southern sympathies.

Yet to what extent is the audience of Ford's films, either that of the 1950s or that of the present day, aware of such levels of signification? I have studied *The Searchers* in some detail, but I certainly did not know about the origins of these songs. I can remember a version of 'The Yellow Rose of Texas' being a hit in the 1950s, but I have not been alive to its political overtones beyond knowing it as a traditional ballad in celebration of Texas. So one would have to say that such meanings as Kalinak uncovers can hardly be essential to our comprehension of the film; but once one knows about them they render the film richer and more complex. In a similar way, Ford's use of landscape in *The Searchers*, set in the stunning location of Monument Valley, does not necessarily require an understanding of the history of landscape aesthetics, but if you know something about the role of desert scenery within the search for an authentic American artistic tradition trying to free itself of European ideals of the sublime, then Ford's vistas take on additional levels of meaning.

Kalinak has discovered a wealth of fascinating material about the origins of many Western songs. Often what one assumes to be a genuine folk song turns out to have been composed; in this way the music offers a kind of manufactured authenticity. Even when a song does have genuine folk origins, it may have gone through several permutations. For example, in *3 Godfathers* (1948) Harry Carey, Jr sings 'The Streets of Laredo'. At the time this would have been familiar to audiences, having been recorded by Gene Autry, among others. The origins of the tune are Anglo-Irish, with words describing the sad demise from venereal disease of a young soldier. In 1876 it was given new words by Francis Henry Maynard, setting it in a cowboy milieu, but traces of its earlier military origins still remained, as in the line 'Bang the drum slowly and play the fife lowly' (p. 107). The performance of this melancholy air in the film by Carey as the Abilene Kid foreshadows his own death.

Kalinak advances a persuasive argument that Ford's use of music often works to complicate the masculinity of his male characters. It is often men who sing in his films. If music, as Kalinak claims, has largely been identified in our culture as a feminine activity (because it is associated with emotion), then 'Ford's westerns redefine masculinity to accommodate traditionally defined feminine values' (p. 138).

- ¹ This topic is given an in-depth treatment in Michael V. Pisani, *Imagining Native America in Music* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2005).

Characters with an excess of masculinity, such as Owen Thursday or Ethan Edwards, not only fail to sing, they even interrupt musical performances, and thus have difficulty eliciting our sympathy.

Kalinak touches on other aspects, such as how the American Indians are given musical expression. Mostly this is through quite conventional means (such as the repeated four drum-beats with emphasis on the first), though in *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964) Alex North's score does incorporate some actual Cheyenne music.¹ There are suggestive remarks too about how music is frequently used in Ford to evoke an alternative cultural dimension, that of Mexico.

One of the virtues of the book for the layperson is that it manages to analyze without relying overmuch on musical terminology. And it is not often that one reads a book of film scholarship and finds oneself humming along.

- 1 See Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons and John Hill, *Cinema and Ireland* (London: Croom Helm, 1987); Brian McIlroy, *World Cinema 4: Ireland* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1989); Martin McLoone, *Irish Film: the Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 2000); Lance Pettitt, *Screening Ireland: Film and Television Representation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Ruth Barton, *Irish National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2004).
- 2 See, for example, Emer and Kevin Rockett, *Neil Jordan: Exploring Boundaries* (Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2003); Cheryl Herr, *The Field* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002); Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996); Ruth Barton, *Acting Irish in Hollywood: from Fitzgerald to Farrell* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006).
- 3 See Harvey O'Brien, *The Real Ireland: the Evolution of Ireland in Documentary Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Kevin Rockett, *Irish Film Censorship: a Cultural Journey from Silent Cinema to Internet Pornography* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004).
- 4 See Brian McIlroy, *Shooting to Kill: Filmmaking and the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland* (Richmond: Steveston Press, 2001); John Hill, *Cinema and Northern Ireland: Film, Culture and Politics* (London: British Film Institute, 2006).
- 5 See Diane Negra (ed.), *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006);

Stephanie Rains, *The Irish-American in Popular Culture, 1945–2000*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007, 252 pp.

Maria Pramaggiore, *Irish and African American Cinema: Identifying Others and Performing Identities, 1980–2000* (SUNY series, Cultural Studies in Cinema/Video). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007, 245 pp.

BRIAN MCILROY

It might be true to say that the scholarship tree of Irish and Irish-related cinema has begun to develop a new branch, one focused on Irish-American comparative film and cultural studies, a critical area to which both Stephanie Rains and Maria Pramaggiore eloquently speak. Irish film studies has traditionally distinguished itself through a concentration on historical, national and political narratives,¹ but auteur, adaptation, cultural and star studies approaches soon followed.² Substantial books on Irish documentary and Irish censorship now exist,³ as do works on Northern Ireland and film/cinema,⁴ while the appearance of two recently edited books suggests that Irishness in the visual field is now recognized as fluid, performative and transnational.⁵

Both writers are interested in the intersections of Irish culture with American culture, although they frame their research questions differently. Where Rains seeks to be an active and working interdisciplinary scholar, consciously incorporating history, politics, film studies, cultural studies, popular literary studies and diasporic studies, Pramaggiore – although fully aware of these strategies – seeks to explore a fascinating comparison between two small but provocative cinemas.

Rains not only discusses what she sees as the recurring figure of the returning Irish-American to Ireland, but also the ways in which the Irish-American diaspora has been defined between 1945 and 2000

Brian McIlroy (ed.), *Genre and Cinema: Ireland and Transnationalism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007).

within the USA. Further, she examines how Irishness is performed, whether by Hollywood films, Irish tourist films, advertising, the cultural phenomenon of *Riverdance*, and even by Irish-themed pubs. (Two such pubs are within ten minutes' walking distance of my home in British Columbia, so no proof is needed to underline its relevance as a subject of study!) The main thrust of Rains's five chapters concerns the mapping of Irish-American attitudes to the perceived home country and their understanding of their ethnicity within the USA.

Rains is persuaded that the interest in genealogy among Americans – some of whom find the discovery of poverty-stricken ancestors enables a pride in their own partial attainment of the American dream – provides a means by which they can claim a vestige of victimization and join any and all identity politics debates. Naturally, John Ford's *The Quiet Man* (1952) falls neatly within Rains's horizon, and she uses it to argue the recuperative nature Ireland holds for Irish-Americans. (She would have found further evidence by looking at the DVD extras for *Darby O'Gill and the Little People* [Robert Stevenson, 1959], where a promotional 'Irish' film made by Walt Disney is featured.) Ironically, Ford's film forces Rains to seek an ingenious reading as, technically speaking, Sean Thornton (John Wayne) is a first-generation immigrant who returns to Ireland in adulthood, rather than a second, third or fourth-generation Irish-American seeking family roots. Rains cleverly points out, however, that Thornton has hardly any memory of his birthplace and must rely on his memory of his now dead mother's description of the place. Rains thus can spring from this film, and others, such as Paul Quinn's *This is My Father* (1998) to raise questions relating to diasporic experience in general and how it is mediated by films and consumer products and their attendant marketing. Unsurprisingly, Irish government-sponsored tourist films actively sought to exploit Irish-American notions of heritage. Interestingly, and perhaps inevitably, Rains discusses the way in which much postcolonial studies and theorizing omits the exilic and diasporic experiences of white Irish people. One suspects that the identity politics so prevalent in the academy in the 1990s has opened a veritable Pandora's Box, leading in some quarters to a Monty Pythonesque race to the bottom (or top?) of the league of victimhood. The Irish came late to this spiral staircase. Few postcolonial commentators take their case seriously, since even the famine-provoked emigration of the 1840s was ultimately a choice, and not the result of formal enslavement. Making distinctions between different kinds of suffering, however, is a treacherous business.

Rains might have made more of work by Hamid Naficy,⁶ and although she usefully taps into Robin Cohen's strands of the 'diasporic rope',⁷ she sometimes ties herself in knots by professing at the outset that she will not be using the terms Catholic and Protestant in relation to Irish-Americans, although a quick glance at the index under these headings proves this not to be the case. After all, John F. Kennedy was the first Catholic president of Irish extraction, a fact that Rains rightly believes

6 Particularly Hamid Naficy's *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

7 Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: an Introduction* (London: University College London Press, 1997).

she must discuss. To wish religion away in matters Irish or Irish-American is to miss the forest for the trees. One sees this awkwardness in the way Rains describes Ron Howard's *Far and Away* (1992), in which Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman play 'a Catholic Irish man and a landlord's daughter' (p. 171) as if Protestant is synonymous with landlord (which will be news to many of the island of Ireland's twenty per cent Protestant minority). To be fair to Howard, he clearly wanted to show that America provided opportunities for both Catholic and Protestant Irish, in addition to what Rains correctly perceives as an opportunity to erase class differences. Of course, the key problem with Howard's film is that he elides the fact that first nations were cleared off the land in order for new immigrants to settle.

Rains switches gear in later chapters, highlighting the disruptive Irishman who comes to America. In *The Devil's Own*, (Alan Pakula, 1997), for example, Harrison Ford plays the good Irish-American father figure (a cop no less) who must extinguish the violence of the old country represented by the IRA terrorist (Brad Pitt). In contrast to the surfeit of brooding Irish men, Irish or Irish-American female characters are thin on the ground and lacking agency; one can only do so much with Maureen O'Hara. The reader senses that it all becomes a play on artifice, both on the Irish and Irish-American sides, a state of affairs perfectly illustrated in Rains's discussion of the romantic comedy *The Matchmaker* (Mark Joffe, 1997), where much of the humour lies in how the Irish perform Irishness for Irish-American consumption. Indeed, Rains might have subtitled her book *The Death of Authenticity*.

One of the interesting links between the two books is that both see connections between the Irish, Irish-American and African-American experiences. Rains alludes to the tour of MP Bernadette Devlin to the USA in 1970/71, during which she consistently drew parallels between the struggle of Catholic citizens in Northern Ireland and the civil rights struggles of African-Americans in the 1960s. Pramaggiore takes up this cultural and political comparison and scrutinizes films produced by Irish and African-Americans between 1980 and 2000. It is a very productive strain of research and brings to the fore significant parallels.

Pramaggiore contributes chapters on musical performance and subcultures in both cinemas, on pregnancy and maternity films, gangster/violent culture and genre. Perhaps the most original aspect of the study is her comparison of Neil Jordan and Spike Lee in relation to their use of music, specifically jazz. Pramaggiore demonstrates that both filmmakers 'convert jazz form into film style, replacing narrative continuity with circularity, riffing and improvisation' (p. 11). I think this is a very perceptive argument as it goes some way to moderate the criticism of both directors' work when the expected 'pay-off' fails to arrive in a number of their films.

Pramaggiore concentrates primarily on character representation as the most useful way to understand the processes by which Irish and African-Americans have had to negotiate a burdensome history, modern

deprivation, and weak male role models. Of course, critics of African-American cinema may well be concerned that Pramaggiore runs the risk of underplaying the unique history of black slavery in her efforts to seek useful parallels. From my own perspective, I think she avoids this pitfall by choosing common thematic issues. The one area that perhaps does not work so neatly is her discussion of African-American gangster films and Irish terrorist films. African-American films, such as *Boyz n the Hood* (John Singleton, 1991) strike me as having an overt social and cultural agenda, with a very minor political dimension; the reverse could be said of the Irish films. Naturally, the nature of oppression felt by Irish and African-Americans has arguably produced the loaded words 'terrorist' and 'gangster'. What is undeniable is that violence has played an important and mostly disastrous role in both communities, and filmmakers have attempted to put that in context.

A strong chapter on pregnancy and maternity films shows how the 1980s and 1990s in Ireland witnessed a painful adjustment on social issues, and how teen pregnancy in African-American communities was publicly demonized during the Reagan years. As Pramaggiore remarks, 'the films situate pregnant women at the center of public debates in ways that emphasize the connections among maternity, colonial history, and national identity' (p. 79). The 'guilty pleasure' chapter is surely the one focused on what Pramaggiore terms the 'Nonessentialist Western'. Here she discusses such films as Mike Newell's *Into The West* (1992), and Mario Van Peebles's *Posse* (1993), drawing attention to how former traditional generic frameworks are given a vital makeover.

While Rains's book started as a PhD dissertation, and retains some of the rhetorical features of such a composition, it is chock-full of many excellent insights, particularly on the behaviour of Irish-American tourists to Ireland (who may be unconsciously purchasing kitsch for a felt lack of historical authenticity or a felt historical or personal loss), and it makes one wonder if that loss is felt on both sides of the Atlantic, affecting both Irish and Irish-American films and filmmakers. A similar working-through is suggested by Pramaggiore's well-written book, and perhaps we will soon see a related work that analyzes African film in relation to African-American film.

Mandy Merck (ed.), *America First: Naming the Nation in US Film*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2007, 313 pp.

TOM BROWN

The relationship between American filmmaking and broader American culture has been the subject of scrutiny since the medium's commercial diffusion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Mandy Merck's edited collection is a novel intervention in this field, examining a practice almost as old – that is, the branding of particular American films through their titles. The history of the American film industry's engagement with notions of 'Americanness' is examined through a series of essays that focus on films ranging from 1917's *The Little American* (Cecil B. DeMille) to *American Splendor* (Shari Springer Burman and Robert Pulcini, 2003). (In the introduction, Merck delves further back into the catalogue of hyperbolically 'American' products to include early travelogues such as the 1903 Niagara film, *American Falls from the Canadian Side* [pp. 4–5]). One's initial reaction might be to wonder at the idiosyncrasy of this survey of American identity as presented by the nation's movies. For example, of the fourteen films covered, only one is a Western (George B. Seitz's 1925 *The Vanishing American*), the genre that, historically speaking, most forcefully and consistently declared its Americanness, though not necessarily in its titles. However, *America First: Naming the Nation in US Film* achieves a coherent arc of historical analysis, particularly impressive is as it takes the form of an edited collection, a format that is in its makeup inherently (though often rewardingly) disparate. This historical analysis is rewarding in relation to two main strands: Hollywood's presentation of national identity at times of war, and issues of race, particularly with regard to the definition of a normatively white American identity in relation to its internally 'other' ethnic identities.¹

¹ One contributor to the collection, Paul Smith, admits 'some discomfort with the chronic use of the "America" and "American" to apply exclusively to the United States of America' (p. 257, fn. 1), a sentiment I wish to echo. However, given the title of the book and its subject matter, the reader will I hope forgive the repetitive use of the term in this review.

The choice of films (or more precisely the choice circumscribed by the corpus of 'American' films) takes in America's involvement in the two world wars, Korea, Vietnam and the 'war on terror'. After Merck's very useful introduction, the collection begins with Kristen Whissel's examination of *The Little American*. In DeMille's film, Mary Pickford's titular heroine undergoes a shift from neutrality to outrage at German aggression that responds directly to the governmental shift represented by President Wilson's appeal to Congress in April 1917. Thus Whissel asserts: '*The Little American* reveals much about the role – imagined and real – played by the moving pictures in mobilizing national sentiment and activity for the new war effort' (p. 26). The film's divisive effect on critics and censors is consequently understood in terms of conflicted attitudes towards America's involvement in the war (pp. 26–8).

America's involvement in World War II is explored in Rembert Hüser's account of King Vidor's didactic intervention in national self-determination and self-definition, *An American Romance* (1944). The subsequent essay by Pam Cook on Minnelli's 1951 *An American in Paris* then situates that film in a particular postwar context. In the film, the decision of Gene Kelly's former GI to stay on in the French capital and pursue a career as an artist is understood as a negotiation of 'a range of popular ideas of American and French culture in order to resolve perceived ideological conflicts between the two' (p. 106). The film's love-triangle narrative and its musical numbers are understood in relation to ambivalent attitudes towards America's economic role in postwar Europe (particularly through the Marshall Plan), and Cook focuses on aspects of the mise-en-scene and the staging of the numbers that vivify this ambivalence.

While Vietnam, or rather its elision, is examined through George Lucas's 1973 *American Graffiti* (Barry Langford's entry on the film offers an excellent, measured account, providing a corrective to many of its contradictory evaluations), US involvement in Korea is more directly the focus of Peter William Evans's essay on *The Quiet American*. The comparison of the 1958 and 2002 film adaptations provides Evans with an opportunity to assess shifting attitudes to American involvement overseas soon after the Asian conflict and then after the events of 9/11.

The history of American representations of racial identity or identities (the conflict between the singular and plural versions of Americanness) constitutes a minor but still rewarding thread running through the collection. William R. Handley's fascinating account of George B. Seitz's 1925 adaptation of Zane Grey's *The Vanishing American* situates the film (and book) amongst representations of native Americans as being in 'a perpetual state of vanishing' (p. 59). This particular consequence of 'Americanization' is played out in the film, forming just one in a line of liberal laments of the American Indians' vanishing, despite (and perhaps even because of) evidence to the contrary. This essay comes early in the collection and neatly sets up the discussion

explored by Paul Smith (looking at *American History X*, directed by Tony Kaye in 1998) and, especially, the essay on *American Me* (Edward James Olmos, 1992) by Ana María Dopico – the latter film, made by an eminent Latino *Americano*, envisions another ethnic group's threatened 'vanishing' as a result of drugs and gang violence.

The rest of the collection covers a range of film texts that are understood in relation to particular moments in American politics, culture and identity. Thus, for H.N. Lukes and Diane Negra respectively, *American Gigolo* (Paul Schrader, 1980) and *An American Werewolf in London* (John Landis, 1981) herald key elements of the Reagan era. Merck's essay on *American Pie* (Paul Weitz, 1999) examines the film at the limits of the 1990s 'gross-out' genre and as an Oedipal drama playing upon that most American of symbols, apple pie. Finally, Esther Leslie's account of *American Splendor* discusses the film's extraordinarily ordinary hero (p. 285) in relation to increasing disillusionment with superheroes in the post-9/11 world of comic books.

America First is therefore a useful book for students and scholars interested in the relationship of a series of films, and film more generally, with the American political landscape from which they emerged. This approach, specifically the case-studies format, does pose some questions that the collection finds it more difficult to answer. For example, while Paul Smith's compelling account of *American History X* has no difficulty in reconciling the aesthetic failings of the film with the broader questions of American attitudes towards racism explored in the film, Ana María Dopico's analysis of a similarly flawed film, *American Me*, is less successful in this regard. Dopico's broad contextualization of the film is compelling, but the close analysis is, in my opinion, much less convincing. For example, Dopico bases a series of conclusions upon the observation that the film does not offer many instances of the optical point of view of its criminal protagonist (p. 215), failing to recognize this device's actually very limited role in film narration. Moreover, given the development of film history methodologies over the last few decades and the well-established rigour of many of its practices and practitioners, Eric Smoodin's quantitative analysis of the reception of *American Madness* (Frank Capra, 1932) and survey of contemporary press materials provides, on the face of it, a welcome addition to the collection. One might agree with Smoodin that films on their own do not transparently reveal the culture from which they emerge (pp. 66–7), but according to the author, contemporary fan magazines do – see for example Smoodin's discussion of French film culture (p. 74). Moreover, the collection's rationale requires that the chosen films engage in a sophisticated and/or complex way with questions of American history. In certain instances, such as *The Americanization of Emily* (Arthur Hiller, 1964), examined by Sharon Willis, one is left wondering if, in reality, this evaluation is well grounded. Given the case-studies approach, this reader was left wishing that the collection had contained more essays by critics committed to close analysis and the examination of the relationship of the particular

(the detail and texture of a film) to the general (the vision of what it is to be 'American' to which the films contribute), although it should be noted that many of the contributors come from outside Film Studies *per se*. The latter observation should not be taken as territorialism, but simply a mild regret that there was not a more profitable balance between the close analysis of individual films and those who profitably problematize such an approach. This criticism should not obscure the book's merits, however, and emerges from an encounter with a highly novel approach to the study of American cinema in its diverse and shifting political contexts.

Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss and C. Lee Harrington, *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2007, 406 pp.

KAREN HEALEY

Why study fans? Fandom is ubiquitous, with everyone appearing either to be a fan or acquainted with someone who is. As this thought-provoking collection of original essays suggests, it is because of fandom's ubiquity that the study of its practices, performances and communities is of value. Fan studies is not (as it is sometimes comically suggested) restricted to the deviant practices of socially maladjusted outsiders, but the source of excellent work on the performance of identity and the construction of community in mainstream society. If everyone is a fan, then the study of fan culture has fascinating things to say about everyone.

The essays are divided into six broad sections: aesthetic and legal judgments of fan-objects and fan texts; fandom 'beyond pop culture'; imagined and physical spaces of fandom; fan audiences worldwide; an inspection of fan cultures; and a focus on the various discords located within fandom, presented in the person of the anti-fan. Like fans themselves, the essays are not always amenable to strict classification. Instead, the themes from one section may be reflected in an essay from another – possibly confusing for those who like everything in its place, but entirely appropriate to the book's ethos.

Since studies in fandom have overwhelmingly concentrated on western fandoms and fan texts, particularly those originating from the USA and UK, the collection's interest in non-western fandoms is very welcome. 'Global fandom/global fan studies', by C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby, largely concludes that among fan scholars there is a 'notable lack of clarity regarding the existence and/or nature of global

fandom, and thus, about the possibilities for global fan studies' (p. 196). However, if the other essays in this section are any indication, a lack of consensus on the nature of global fandom is not necessarily a barrier to good work; they all make compelling arguments to 'go global' – albeit with caution and the awareness that accepted western models of fan culture theory may not be universally applicable.

The collection also makes a point of including thoughts on western audiences that have usually been ignored or presented as laudably untainted by the middle-class, media-obsessed stereotype of fandom. Music culture, gamer culture and sports culture are here investigated as fan cultures. Sports fandom is particularly well represented, with essays on the marginalization of women in soccer fandom, the progress of wrestling's 'smart fans' to backyard wrestlers and the anti-fan within the fan identity of those who follow two Athenian soccer teams.

'High culture' fandoms, which have been almost entirely excluded from fan studies, are here represented by four essays that cover fandoms as diverse as news audiences, Chekhov lovers and Bach devotees. The highlight of this section, and possibly the book, is Alan McKee's essay 'The fans of cultural theory'. Beginning with an OED definition of 'theory' and smugly concluding that 'theory fans' are complicit consumers of the commodified culture they claim to resist, McKee's initial mini-essay is a poker-faced demonstration of his real point; that 'simply demonstrating an imbrication within commodified culture doesn't exhaust the potential interest of fan culture' (p. 95). Instead, he argues that theory fans sometimes forget that they *are* fans and proceed as if '*our* cultural pleasures are rational and our ideas are genuinely challenging to capitalism, while the cultural pleasures of *others* are emotional and their ideas don't genuinely challenge the system' (p. 96, italics in original). In their separate essays, Cornel Sandvoss and Matt Hills make similar cases for abandoning academia's traditional attachment to a false belief in its own neutral rationality that denies the impact of aesthetic judgment.

Anti-fans (those who are characterized by a negative affective bond to their fan-object) are also investigated. *Fandom* includes essays on fans and anti-fans of Martha Stewart; on 'the power-laden discursive struggles [that] play a constitutive role in structuring the fan–text–producer relationship' in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s season six; anti-fandom as an aspect of the performance of a sports fan identity; and a study of two families, one conservative and one liberal, whose anti-fan behaviour towards various television shows is intriguingly presented as responses to 'the hurts of history' (pp. 286, 354).

Anti-fandom itself is demonstrated in Jeffrey Sconce's essay 'A vacancy at the Paris Hilton', in which Hilton's image and antics are presented as the ultimate triumph of Baudrillardian hyperreality. Interesting in its application of theory, this piece may demonstrate why studying fans appears to hold more appeal for researchers than studying anti-fans; peppered with statements such as 'What beautiful

1 The Organization for Transformative Works. URL: <http://transformativeworks.org/about/> [accessed 10 January 2008].

actress would really be humiliated by the exposure of a famous and well-compensated bosom?', I found the essay's spite for its supposedly vacuous subjects ultimately unenjoyable (p. 333).

It is curious that creative fandom is almost entirely absent from *Fandom*. Rebecca Tushnet's intriguing essay on the legal standing of fanworks will be of interest even outside academia, especially in light of the recent establishment of the Organization for Transformative Works, which '[envision[s)] a future in which all fannish works are recognized as legal and transformative and are accepted as a legitimate creative activity'.¹ However, aside from Lawrence B. McBride and S. Elizabeth Bird's successful argument for backyard wrestling as a fan production, the producerly aspects of fandom are hardly considered. Since the production of fanworks has proved crucial to many fans' performance of fan identity and the formation of fan communities, this critical absence is somewhat problematic.

Despite this absence, *Fandom*'s otherwise broad inclusivity and gestures towards exciting new directions for fan studies make it an essential text for any scholar of fan cultures or media audiences. Appropriately, fan studies godfather Henry Jenkins closes with an afterword entitled 'The future of fandom'. Fandom, he observes, is increasingly pushed towards the mainstream by cultural bodies and appropriated by producers eager to take advantage of fandom's potential profitability. He argues that as 'As fandom becomes part of the normal way that the creative industries operate, then fandom may cease to function as a meaningful category of cultural analysis', and concludes that 'Maybe, in that sense, fandom has *no* future' (p. 364, italics in original). If this book is any indication, the future of fan *studies* is assured. Those with fannish and/or academic interests will certainly find something of value in this well-selected and challenging collection.

Contributors

Hannah Andrews is a postgraduate student in the Department of Film and Television at the University of Warwick. She is currently undertaking research into avant-garde and art film on television.

Tom Brown is Lecturer in Film at the University of Reading and coeditor of *Film and Television after DVD* (2008). His research interests lie primarily in 'classical' Hollywood and its French counterpart, with particular emphasis on the role of 'spectacle'. He is currently developing a monograph on the history of direct address in the cinema.

Edward Buscombe is Professor of Film Studies at the University of Sunderland and the author of *The Searchers* in the BFI Film Classics series.

John Ellis is Professor of Media Arts at Royal Holloway University of London. A member of the *Screen* editorial board between 1977 and 1987, he was a producer of Channel 4's first cinema programme *Visions* (1982–85). He spent seventeen years running the independent company Large Door. His books include *TV FAQ: Uncommon Answers to Common Questions about TV* (2007), *Seeing Things* (2000) and *Visible Fictions* (1984).

Karen Healey is a PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne, where she is currently writing a dissertation on superhero comics as fan production.

Jason Jacobs is Reader in Cultural History at the University of Queensland and author of *The Intimate Screen: Early British Television Drama* (2000).

Paul Kerr is Senior Lecturer in Broadcast Media at London Metropolitan University. He is author and editor of a number of books and articles on television and film. He started his career at the British Film Institute but for the next twenty years he was a television producer for the BBC and Channel 4. He is a former member of the *Screen* editorial board and was a producer-director at London-based October Films from 1999 to 2007.

Julia Knight is Reader in Moving Image at the University of Sunderland, coeditor of *Convergence: the International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, and co-convenor of the Future Histories of the Moving Image Research Network. She has most recently been leading an AHRC-funded research project examining independent/artists' film and video distribution in the UK from 1970s onwards. She is editor of the first anthology of writing on British video art, *Diverse Practices* (1996). Before academia, she worked in the UK independent film and video sector.

Sarita Malik researches, writes and lectures in the area of race and representation within the context of television, cinema and the creative industries. She is author of *Representing Black Britain: Black and Asian Images on Television* (2002). She is based at Brunel University where she is Researcher on the ESRC-funded project The Public Understanding of Risk and Regulation.

Brian McIlroy is cofounder of the Centre for Cinema Studies at the University of British Columbia. He is editor of *Genre and Cinema: Ireland and Transnationalism* (2007).

Edna M. Rodríguez-Mangual is Associate Professor of Hispanic Studies at Hamilton College, where she teaches Latin American literature, culture and film.

She is author of *Lydia Cabrera and the Construction of an Afro-Cuban Cultural Identity* (2004) and has written several articles on Cuban film.

Peter Thomas was Post-Doctoral Research Fellow on an AHRC-funded research project examining the distribution of independent film and video in the UK from the 1970s to the present, at the University of Sunderland. He is currently working on presenting the study's findings online in a searchable databased chronology, linked to another database of digitized source documents and interviews. He received his doctorate from Griffith University, Australia, in 2001.

Nuria Triana Toribio is Senior Lecturer in Spanish and Head of Discipline for Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies at the School of Languages, Linguistics and Cultures, University of Manchester. She is author of *Spanish National Cinema* (2003) and coauthor, with P. Buse and A. Willis, of *The Cinema of Álex de la Iglesia* (2007). She is coeditor of the Spanish and Latin American Filmmakers series for Manchester University Press.

Carol Vernallis is Associate Professor in the Media Arts and Studies Division of the Department of Communication at Wayne State University, where she teaches film and video theory and production. She is author of *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context* (2004) and *The Art and Industry of Music Video: Conversations and Essays* (forthcoming). She is also a videomaker whose works have been screened at festivals in the USA and Europe.

Elisabeth Weis is Professor of Film at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Her books include *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* (1985), coedited with John Belton, and *The Silent Scream: Alfred Hitchcock's Sound Track* (1982).

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1. Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: the Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Celia Britton. Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti (London: Macmillan, 1982).
2. Ginette Vincendeau, 'Melodramatic realism: on some French women's films in the 1930s', *Screen*, vol. 30, no. 3 (1989), pp. 51–65.
3. Monika Treut, 'Female misbehaviour', in Laura Pietrapaolo and Ada Testaferri (eds), *Feminisms in the Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 106–21.

References to *films* in both notes and main text should include full title with initial capitalisation according to accepted style of the language concerned. Titles should be italicised, and in the case of non-English language films original release title should precede US and/or British release title, followed by director and release date in round brackets:

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The Big Sleep (Howard Hawks, Warner Bros, US, 1945)

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